THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP AND SELF-ESTEEM IN MIDDLE ADOLESCENT GIRLS

A dissertation submitted

by

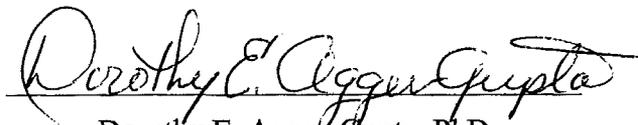## SUSAN A. MIELE

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between girl-to-girl friendships and self-esteem in middle adolescent girls (ages 14 – 17). Although a significant body of research exists on friendships and self-esteem in adolescent girls, studies on the relationship between the two concepts are scarce. This qualitative study used narrative inquiry to understand middle adolescent girls' experiences with friendships and explored how these experiences connected to their self-esteem. The research focused on the stories 19 middle adolescent girls told about their friendships and themselves. Narrative analysis using Brown and Gilligan's (1992) *Listening Guide* enabled the details of the participants' stories to be examined through the girls' voices.

This research underscores the importance of girl-to-girl friendships for middle adolescent girls and advances the understanding of the connection of these friendships to self-esteem. Four key findings emerged in the study. First, *the role of others in how middle adolescent girls feel about themselves* shows a link between friendship and self-esteem. Second, *participants' successful navigation of the darker side of friendship* enhances self-worth and enables the selection of higher quality friends. Third, *higher quality friends positively influence participants' self-esteem*. Lastly, participants' self-esteem is reinforced through *success in school, sports, and social interactions, which are closely connected to participants' friendships*. This study further reinforces that the

affirmation, support, and acceptance of friends strengthens the competence and self-worth of middle adolescent girls.

Key words: middle adolescent girls, friendships, self-esteem, competence, and self-worth.

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This dissertation is dedicated to all the girls – but especially to my girl, Allison.

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Chapter One: The Study

Strong girls grow up feeling secure in themselves. They learn to take action, making positive choices about their own lives and do positive things for others. Strong girls grow up to lead full, valuable lives. (Simmons, 2009, p. 32)

This study examines the relationship between girl-to-girl friendships and self-esteem in middle adolescent girls. The tireless work of a non-profit organization called Strong Women Strong Girls (SWSG) in Boston ignited my interest in this topic. For more than 10 years, SWSG has worked to foster self-esteem in girls to *preserve their ambition, equality, and safety as independent women.* The role of girl-to-girl friendships in self-esteem is not measured in the outcomes that SWSG reports. The absence of this measure framed my desire to explore how girls' friendships and self-esteem may be connected.

Through discovery and analysis of the stories and experiences of adolescent girls, the goal of this research is to contribute to the existing knowledge on the role friendships play in the development of self-esteem of middle adolescent girls. The scarcity of knowledge connecting the two concepts highlights the importance of this study. Literature suggests girls' self-esteem peaks at age 9 and plummets in middle adolescence (age 14 -17), (Gurian, 2014). Several reasons cited for this precipitous drop include the increasing pressure of school, the growing complexity of peer relationships, and the physiological changes that occur as girls advance in adolescence (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gurian, 2014; Harter, 1993). Concurrent with these dynamics, friends become increasingly important to girls at this important stage in their development (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013). This simultaneous decrease in self-esteem and increase in the importance of girl-to-girl friendships further strengthens the need to understand their relationships through this study.

Background

My research interests are deeply rooted in my own adolescence. Growing up in a low-income area of Boston with disinterested parents who showed little support for my development, I had limited educational opportunities, and little direction. As I wrote my autobiography for my application to Fielding, I wondered how I ended up here when many of my contemporaries barely graduated high school. How did I not fall victim to the drugs and alcohol that were prevalent in my community? What strength led me to a successful professional career, a loving family of my own, and the self-confidence to pursue a PhD? These questions have influenced all of my work at Fielding and my commitment to SWSG.

Without strong parenting, my development was at-risk. The lack of safety, exposure to illegal activities, and prevalence of petty crime in my low-income neighborhood intensified the developmental risks. Friends, and in particular, one best friend, made up what I lacked in family support. In my heart I believe it was that relationship that enabled me to have the self-confidence to go to college and leave behind the confines that would otherwise have limited me. It is that relationship in particular, friendships in general, and my deep interest in adolescent girls that fueled my desire to understand the connection between friendships and self-esteem.

This interest has been supported and fostered by my research at Fielding, which has almost exclusively focused on the development of adolescent girls. I have examined how girls develop as leaders, looked at the motivation and influence of young feminists, and studied the role resilience plays in development. I researched the media's impact on girls today, relational aggression in adolescent girls, and female gender development.

Each of these topics informs the focus and importance of this study in understanding the

relationship of friendships and self-esteem in adolescent girls.

Significance

Positive self-esteem in adolescent girls is widely believed by researchers to be

beneficial to their healthy development as adults (Burke & Cast, 2002). Adolescent girls

are at the intersection of girlhood and womanhood, often a time of psychological struggle.

Girls seek to find a voice while being beset by a barrage of cultural messages that

diminish their sense of self and commitment to who they are (Brown & Lamb, 2006).

Books, television, the Internet, friends, and family, reinforce a pervasive social system of

gender inequality and sexual objectification of girls (Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008).

Adolescent girls often experience a drop in self-confidence, struggling inwardly

with body image, disordered eating, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Brown & Lamb,

2006). External struggles in adolescent girls emerge in the form of fighting, drugs, and

early sexual activity. These challenges create a myriad of risks to the healthy

development of adolescent girls (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Brown & Lamb, 2006; Burke

& Cast, 2002).

Friendships can buffer these internal and external struggles. Friendships create a

sense of shared purpose for adolescent girls that enhance their confidence and sense of

self. Research shows that friends influence each other's attitudes, social behavior, and

academic achievement (Berndt, 1982; Bukowski, Motzoi, Meyer, 2011; Hartup &

Stevens, 1997; Hinde, 1995). Theory suggests that adolescents with friends possess

higher self-esteem than adolescents without friends (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013). Yet as

noted by Bagwell and Schmidt (2013), there are few studies that support this position

directly or explore the connections made by girls between their friendships and their self-esteem. The absence of such studies reinforces the importance of this research.

Research Question

How do adolescent girls construct a relationship between their girl-to-girl friendships and their self-esteem? Research to date on friendships, adolescent girls, and self-esteem, indicates that adolescent girls give meaning to their competence and self-worth through the context of their friendships, shaping the reality of their self-esteem. This research is discussed in depth in the review of the literature in Chapter 2. Through the narratives of adolescent girls and in particular how they talk about their girl-to-girl friendships, this qualitative research study is designed to better understand in rich detail how girls construct the relationship between their girl-to-girl friendships and their self-esteem.

Operational Definitions

1. Middle adolescent girls – Adolescence has been characterized by Erik Erikson (1968) as the period of time where an individual must establish a sense of personal identity demonstrated by meaningful self-concept. Middle adolescence occurs between the ages of 14 and 17. Girls at this stage are typically through puberty and their physical growth has slowed. Cognitively, the ability for abstract thought, reasoning, and planning expands during these years (Pruitt, 1999). Socio-emotionally, middle adolescent girls report a heightened reliance on peer groups as they assert their independence in a quest to understand who they are (Pruitt, 1999).

2. Friendships -- Friendships exist throughout life, from early childhood through old age. Friendship in this study is defined as a strong, constructive, emotional bond that exists between two or more persons and is intended to facilitate the accomplishment of socio-emotional goals. This definition is drawn from the research of Sullivan (1953), Hinde (1995), and Hartup and Stevens (1997).

3. Self-esteem -- The definition of self-esteem that is most applicable for this study is based on the interrelationship of the two key dimensions of self-esteem: competence and self-worth. Nathanial Branden (1969) introduced this integrated approach to self-esteem in his book, *The Psychology of Self-Esteem.*

> Self-esteem has two interrelated aspects: it entails a sense of personal efficacy and a sense of personal worth. It is the integrated sum of self-confidence and self-respect. It is the conviction that one is *competent* to live and *worthy* of living. (p. 110)

Personal efficacy is defined as an individual's belief about her capability to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect her life (Bandura, 1987). Personal efficacy is often referred to as competence in scholarly and popular literature on self-esteem; it concerns the degree to which people see themselves as proficient and effective. Personal worth is defined as a sense of one's own value as a person (Harter, 2012). Burke and Cast (2002) reinforce competence and self-worth as two interlocked dimensions of self-esteem. Examining self-esteem as these dimensions enables a focus on life experiences that enhance or lessen how competent and worthy one feels (Mruk, 2006b).

Research Limitations

This research is a qualitative study using narrative inquiry. Middle adolescent girls were interviewed for the study. One limitation of the study is the research setting. The main setting for the study is suburban towns outside of Boston, Massachusetts with one participant being from a town suburban to Seattle, Washington. The selection of participants from towns with similar demographic and socio-economic characteristics suggests that the researcher will deeply understand this participant sample. Yet this may limit the applicability of the findings to different settings and demographic groups.

Additional limitations may occur as a result of the research method of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher deeper participation in the interview process enabling meaningful interaction and connections with the participants. This depth can lead to researcher bias influencing data collection and analysis. To mitigate untended impact of bias in this study, the data collection and analysis steps were meticulous. While collecting the data, the researcher maintained a position of neutrality, listening without judgment, and showing respect for each participant's unique story. In analyzing the data, Brown and Gilligan's (1992) *Listening Guide* was used. This comprehensive analysis approach requires the personal reactions and feelings of the researcher to be noted in the first step of the analysis to ensure they do not unduly influence study outcomes.

Assumptions

Several assumptions frame this research. The first is that girls who participated in the research understood the study and shared their stories honestly and openly. Second, this research is based on the assumption that the theoretical research available to date is of high quality, accurately depicting the experience of girls. The last assumption is that

the socio-cultural climate in American high schools can be a barrier to middle adolescent

girls becoming strong women. These assumptions underlie this study's examination of

the journey of middle adolescent girls toward healthy development in the context of

friendship and self-esteem.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Friendships in childhood are usually a matter of chance, whereas in adolescence they are most often a matter of choice. (Elkin, 1993, p. 497)

Friendships

The pervasiveness of friendships in childhood and adolescence suggests they play a foundational role in healthy adolescent development. In 1898, William S. Monroe published the first known study of peer relationships, "Social Consciousness in Children," in *Psychological Review*, comparing children with and without friends. This early study of over two thousand boys and girls examined the traits and habits of friendship selection and the associated developmental consequences of being friendless. It is important for this research that the role of friendships in healthy adolescent development is understood. The research on friendship and its developmental significance in adolescence is critically analyzed in this section.

Berndt's (1982) comprehensive review of foundational research on the features of adolescent friendship delineated three important characteristics. These include the intimacy of the relationships, the similar nature of friends, and a high level of responsiveness or mutuality in engagement. Understanding the distinctness of these characteristics is critical to appreciating their influence on healthy adolescent development. Identity development, individuation, and scholastic achievement mark positive advancement of adolescents toward adulthood. Close friendships have been shown to enable these markers of success. Friendships provide a safe haven for development through their intimacy, similarity, and mutual responsiveness (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013; Berndt, 1982, 2004; Bukowski et al., 2011, Hardy, Bukowski, & Sippola, 2002; Johnson, 2004).

Intimacy. Foundational to the friendship literature is the psychoanalytic theory of Henry Stack Sullivan (1953), which dominated the study of peer relationships until the late 1990s. His seminal work, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (1953), recognized intimacy as a fundamental feature of friendships in adolescence, regardless of gender. Sullivan's (1953) work leveraged his psychoanalytic training with social psychology in the study of relationships and communication between individuals of all ages. Hinde's (1995) research on the science of interpersonal relationships and their key dimensions integrates Sullivan's (1953) findings and corroborates the idea that intimacy is a foundational dimension of friendship. In this qualitative research paper, Hinde provides structure to the vast body of knowledge on interpersonal relationships. Hinde's structure organizes the meanings, expectations, and emotions of relationships into characteristics that reinforce intimacy as a positive defining feature of friendship.

More recent research on intimacy in adolescent relationships describes self-disclosure and emotional closeness as the key characteristics underlying a deep connection between friends (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013; Berndt & Murphy, 2002; Hardy et al., 2002). The cognitive development that comes to life in middle adolescent girls enables them to display an intensity of connection more pronounced than when they were younger (Pruitt, 1999). Friends begin to acquire deep knowledge of each other and build trust relationally as a result of their sharing (Berndt, 2004). Intimacy achieved through self-disclosure is important in co-constructing narratives of friendships (Azmitia, Ittel, & Radmacher, 2005). Through this self-disclosure middle adolescent girls interpret their friendship experiences. These experiences form the basis for later construction of adult life stories on how friendship influenced their development (Habermas & Bluck, 2000).

The move to high school, which happens nearly simultaneously with middle adolescence, creates new opportunities for engagement as students move among classrooms throughout the day and have more chances to participate in intimate dialogue. In high school, adolescents widen their peer network and develop concentric circles -- *best friends*, *close friends*, and *just friends* (Gurogu, Lieshout, Haselager, & Scholte, 2007). These different circles of friends satisfy different needs including intimacy, sociality, and camaraderie. Best friends tend to be those that engage in the most intimate of conversations. All of these connections and layers of friendships validate self-worth in middle adolescent girls by demonstrating that they matter in the eyes of their friends (Berndt, 1982; Gurogu et al., 2007).

Self-perceptions. Friendships have been shown to help engender positive self-perceptions, but a smaller body of emerging research demonstrates that this is not always the case (Azmitia, 2001; Berndt, 2004; Laursen & Pursell, 2009). Social comparison and the opinion of others are of utmost importance in middle adolescence. Sociologist and scholar Charles Cooley initially described "the looking glass self" in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902). The essence of the metaphor "looking glass self" is that one's perception of self is dependent on the thoughts of others (Cooley, 1902). More recent research by Azmitia (2001) and Harter (2012), specific to girls, discusses the continual self-evaluation process that engulfs middle adolescent girls. Girls at this age engage in never-ending self-judgment -- Am I too smart, too dumb? Am I pretty or not? Do I look fat in this outfit? Sociocultural norms increase this pressure exacerbating a preoccupation with validation from others.

Middle adolescent girls today are nearly always "photo ready," never knowing when a picture might be posted to a social networking site. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat reinforce the idea that others' opinions matter. Middle adolescent girls assign high value to the number of "likes" -- approvals by friends of one's picture posted in social media (King, 2016). These pictures, often "selfies" or self-portraits taken with a smart phone suggest that Cooley's "looking glass self" lives on as a critical concept in middle adolescence more than 100 years since it initially appeared in the literature.

Azmitia (2001) reinforces Cooley's (1902) metaphor confirming, "our self-esteem is constructed from our perception of how others see us" (p.170). As much as this can be positive, friends can also be a source of anxiety, competition, and jealously as girls struggle to live up to the normative values of their group of girlfriends. This dark side of friendship makes girls more psychologically vulnerable given the tremendous value they place on their friendships as a measure of their own self-worth (Benenson & Christakos, 2003).

Similarity. Similarity has been shown to draw and keep friends together and is the second critical dimension of friendship. Friends are often similar in age, sex, and race. Gurogu, Lieshout, Haselager, and Scholte (2007) discuss friendships in their quantitative study on the behavioral profiles of different types of friends. Their research of 1,102 adolescent friendship dyads, made up of both boys and girls, studies neighborhood and school socio-demographic influences on adolescent friendships. Gurogu et al. posit that adolescents are drawn to friends similar to themselves as a result of where they live and go to school. Similarity is marked in these friendship dyads by pro-social behavior and

positive psychosocial adjustment (Gurogu et al., 2007). Findings in an earlier study by

Hartup and Stevens (1997) are analogous to those of Gurogu et al., concluding that

likeness among adolescent boys and girls and their friends derives from the social forces

that bring demographically similar peers together in childhood.

In contrast to the conclusions of Hartup and Stevens (1997) and Gurogu et al.

(2007), the research of Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker (2006) ascertains that similarity in

friends' personality and social behavior is a result of adolescent friendship rather than a

coincidence of environment. Rubin et al.'s (2006) study analyzes recent theory on the

connection between peer relationships and development to understand how peers impact

social, emotional, and cognitive functioning of adolescents. Rubin et al. conclude

similarity results from the relationship between friends, not from socio-demographic

influences such as school or community.

Personality and social behavior are important attributes in friends. Personality and

social behavior for adolescents includes "sociability, peer popularity, academic

achievement, and motivation" (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013, p. 123). When adolescent boys

and girls have friends they exhibit positive social behavior, they are engaged, and

motivated to achieve. Friendless adolescents often display anti-social behavior. They are

withdrawn, quiet, and not motivated to participate in school or relationships (Bukowski,

Motzoi, & Meyer, 2011).

A meta-analysis of theoretical and empirical friendship literature conducted by

Bukowski et al. (2011) assessed personality and social behavior in regard to friendship.

Their research showed that similarity in these characteristics is not an either/or

proposition. Evidence in their analysis supports the premise that adolescents select

friends who are similar to them personally and socially, and these attributes become more similar as a result of their friendship. Significant theoretical data, however, exist on both sides of this debate. Bagwell and Schmidt's (2013) comprehensive summary of friendship literature studies the role of friendships in adolescent social, emotional, and cognitive development from both nomothetic and idiographic perspectives. Their research supports that friend selection by adolescent boys and girls is based on similarity of demographic and behavioral characteristics.

Other studies (Berndt & Murphy, 2002; Berndt, 1982; Bukowski & Sippola, 1996) suggest that mutual socialization within friendships influences an increasing similarity in friends as their relationships evolve. Regardless of how it occurs, the evidence supports the premise that similarity is a key dimension of friendships in adolescence. Middle adolescent girls befriend others who are similar to them and their relationship then increases their similarity.

Mutual responsiveness. The third distinguishing feature of friendship is mutual responsiveness (Bukowski et al., 2011). Mutual responsiveness or *reciprocity* describes how friends act toward each other, not just how they feel about each other. Unlike other peer relationships such as classmates or teammates, approachability and engagement are ubiquitous in friendships, and underlie the strong, affective bond that defines friendship. In Sullivan's (1953) early studies, reciprocated liking is connected to intimacy. As Sullivan found, and Bukowski et al. (2011) later supported, as adolescent boys and girls develop a capacity for intimacy, they practice reciprocity in an ideal sense, treating their friends as they wish to be treated.

Bukowski's et al. (2011) research asked fundamental questions about friendship and its developmental significance. Their meta-analysis combined findings from a broad range of theories and empirical studies to define friendship, its function, and the impact it has on behavior, emotional development, and well being. Bukowski et al. confirmed mutual responsiveness as one of the key pillars of friendship. Their findings show mutual responsiveness positively impacts social competence, conflict management, engagement, and relationship quality in adolescents.

The multitude of empirical studies analyzed by Bukowski and his colleagues indicate over multiple years, in a variety of contexts, that adolescent boys and girls with friends engage more frequently in social interactions and positive behavior than those without friends. Friends are more cooperative and responsive to each other and resolve conflict through collaboration, seeking to negotiate a win-win outcome. Friends participate more enthusiastically in tasks together, demonstrating a willingness to explore and try new things all while engaging in small talk, laughter, and camaraderie (Bukowski et al., 2011).

Protective function of friendships. The social competence and confidence that result from friendship has been shown to mitigate two dominant risk factors for adolescent boys and girls: dysfunctional families and peer-victimization. Low support, sluggish functioning, chronic maltreatment, violent conflict, or some combination of these issues defines dysfunctional families (Bukowski et al., 2011). Peer-victimization refers to any type of aggressive attack on another peer (Bukowski et al., 2011). In middle adolescence, repeat exposure to either of these risks can lead to significant behavioral threats to healthy day-to-day life. Adolescents who are withdrawn and/or behave in a

destructive manner either through suicidal thoughts, lethargy, and depression or through

retaliatory violence, poor school performance, or abuse of alcohol or drugs often come

from dysfunctional families or have been victims of peer violence (Hardy et al., 2002).

Extensive longitudinal studies (Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Asses, & Sippola, 1996;

Labile, Carlo, & Rafaelli, 2000; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006; Schwartz, Dodge,

Petit, & Bates, 2000) all support the central proposal of Sullivan's (1953) early research

that friendships have a moderating effect on poor parent relationships, harsh home

environments, and disengaged parents. Friends make these difficult situations more

tolerable by providing an outlet and support system. These quantitative studies show

increased social competence, self-confidence, and adjustment capabilities are

characteristics of adolescents who navigate these environments with the support of

friends.

Specifically, the 3-year longitudinal study conducted by Gauze, et al. (1996)

found that in maladaptive family situations, adolescents with friends expressed greater

feelings of self-worth compared to adolescents in similar family situations who did not

have friends. Rubin et al.'s (2006) examination of middle school students with and

without friends discovered that those with friends were buffered from a lack of parental

support and performed better in school and socially. While Schwartz, et al. (2000)

conducted longitudinal studies that revealed extensive friendship networks in adolescence

moderated the negative impact of harsh home environments and peer victimization.

Complementing the vast quantitative research on friendships is a nascent body of

qualitative research (Azmitia, 2001; Azmitia et al., 2005; Way, 1999) that explores girls'

friendships through narratives. Azimita et al.'s (2005) findings are consistent with the

quantitative research presented in this chapter. She and her colleagues found girls

narrated their stories in ways that support the empirical findings. Girls share stories of

their experiences that demonstrate intimacy, similarity, and mutual responsiveness as the

foundation of the loyalty, trust, and emotional support of friendships.

Dark side of friendship. Berndt's (2004) half-century look back at the research

on the friendships of adolescent boys and girls notes an absence of scholarly literature on

the dark side of friendship – the negative features of friendship or the harmful

interactions that occur between friends. Yet he points to the dark side as implicit in

Sullivan's (1953) seminal work. Sullivan claimed that adolescents, regardless of gender,

are motivated by self-interest or an intense sense of "what is in it for me." Sullivan also

identified a pervasive sense of competition common to adolescents that can be both a

motivator and a source of frustration in friendships. The continuum of consequences

resulting from rivalry can be as relatively minor as jealously or hurt feelings or as

detrimental as dissolution of the friendship or diminishment of a girl's sense of self-worth

(Laursen & Pursell, 2009).

Good friends often make amends quickly in situations where the consequences

are minor due to a strong relational foundation built on their intimacy, similarity, and

mutual responsiveness (Azmitia, 2001). Trustworthiness of good friends results from this

strong foundation and is viewed as the key obligation of adolescent girl friends. If self-

interest or competition violates the "girl code" -- the informal, unwritten, set of rules that

adolescent girls must follow to stay in their friend community -- irreparable damage may

result (Azmitia, Lippman, & Ittel, 1999). Infractions to the code include breaking

promises, exclusion of one friend for another, gossiping, dating a friend's boyfriend,

publicly criticizing how a friend looks, or spending too much time with friends outside of the group (Azmitia et al., 1999). Damage can be visible, such as name calling or shunning, or it can be invisible such as depression, anxiety, or other stress-related maladies.

Laursen (1995) and Laursen and Pursell (2009) studied conflict in adolescent girl friendships. Their meta-analysis of normative features of peer conflict confirms that conflict can be stressful, heightening anxiety in adolescent girls and if unresolved, threatening healthy adjustment. Yet, they identify conflict as an integral part of friendship dynamics dispelling conventional wisdom that conflict is inherently negative. Laursen and Pursell (2009) corroborate that within supportive non-threatening relationships, like friendships, conflict has benefits. If adolescent girls are able to successfully work through conflict with a friend they often strengthen their relationships as a result. Conflict resolution that corrects an injustice can increase a girl's moral awareness and development. Expressing and defending views to resolve difficulties promotes cognitive development for adolescent girls, leading to a stronger sense of independence and autonomy.

Friendship Summary

These encouraging findings underscore the multiple positive outcomes that accrue to middle adolescents who have friends, while also acknowledging the potential downside of friendships. Researchers report that intimacy, similarity, and mutual responsiveness create a sense of shared purpose in friends that enhances confidence in adolescents and helps protect them from risk factors. Friends influence each other's attitudes, social behavior, and academic achievement promoting positive outcomes in

each of these areas. The data also suggest that adolescents with friends have a greater sense of self-worth.

Adolescent friendships facilitate socio-emotional health while minimizing harm and maximizing support. Friends are committed to each other's needs and well-being; they treat each other fairly and keep each other out of trouble. Scholarly arguments that friendships serve an important function in healthy adolescent development are strong and deep. Early theorists (Kohlberg, 1963; Piaget, 1932; Sullivan, 1953) showed that the characteristics of friendship go beyond socio-emotional health in adolescents to a fundamental role in moral development.

Friendships are significant in adolescence. Middle adolescents spend countless hours with their friends. The opinion of friends holds significant influence in decision-making and appearance. Friends are idolized; a behavior that is reinforced in countless books, movies, and television shows that model the importance and meaning of friendships. The popularity of Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat confirms how important the social realm is to middle adolescents and provides a platform that underscores the role of friendships today. Friendships play a critical role in helping adolescents master the developmental challenges they face in this important stage: negotiating independence from parents, success in school academically and socially, and the formation of their sense of self.

Many questions, however, have yet to be answered. Does having good friends contribute to healthy development in a way that cannot be accomplished otherwise? Is it the quality of friendships that has the most meaningful impact? Intimacy, similarity, and mutual responsiveness are defining features of high-quality friendships, but what is their

relationship to one another? Little is found in the research discussing how these

characteristics link to each other. While this research is focused on the connection

between girl-to-girl friendships and self-esteem, the study may uncover or touch upon

answers to these other important questions.

Self-Esteem

The study of self-esteem has a long history in social science. William James first

introduced the concept in 1890 in what is often regarded as the first psychological

textbook, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890/1983). Self-esteem remains a vital and

resilient topic today. Its vitality is rooted in the breadth of its reach across the broad

continuum of human development. Self-esteem as a topic has thrived amidst decades of

controversial academic and theoretical discourse (Mruk, 2006b). The controversy in the

discourse stems from the myriad of ways theorists have defined and presented self-

esteem over the last century. Many theorists, including James (Burke & Cast, 2002;

Crocker & Park, 2004; Epstein, 1980; Rosenberg, 1965), favor a one-dimensional

definition of self-esteem, while others (Branden, 1969; Harter, 2012; Mruk, 2006a) prefer

more complex multi-dimensional definitions.

In its broadest definition, "global self-esteem" refers to an individual's overall

evaluation of the self (Burke & Cast, 2002; Gecas, 1982; James, 1890; Mruk, 2006b;

Rosenberg, 1965). The one-dimensional literature (Crocker & Park, 2004; Epstein, 1980;

James, 1890; Rosenberg, 1965) discusses self-esteem either with a singular bias toward

competence as the key determinant of self-esteem, or alternatively, with a bias toward

self-worth as the underlying factor. The multi-dimensional or two-factor literature (e.g.,

Gecas, 1982; Harter, 2012; Mruk, 2006b; Tafarodi & Swann, Jr., 2001) frames self-esteem as an integrated relationship between competence and self-worth.

Competence. James (1890/1983) identified self-esteem as a ratio between achievements and aspirations or "actualities to potentialities."

> Our feeling in this world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be and do.
> It is determined by the ratio of our actualities to supposed potentialities, a fraction,
> where our pretentions are the denominator and the numerator our success. (p. 296)

James' view of self-esteem is behavioral. He did not believe that general success or overall competency influences self-esteem; rather, he strongly argued in his research that only competence in areas self-identified as important determines whether success or failure has meaning to one's self-esteem. Competence in areas that matter and drive behavior leads to alignment of one's *ideal* self and one's *real* self (James, 1890/1983).

Competence-based self-esteem remains relevant in current research. Crocker and Park (2004) discuss self-esteem in terms of how people attempt to maintain, protect, and enhance their self-esteem through success in domains in which their self-worth has been staked. Domains that influence how they think about themselves. Self-esteem grows through setting goals and developing the skills to bring them into reality through hard work and effort. Burke and Cast (2002) describe self-esteem as self-efficacy, or the degree to which people see themselves as capable of achieving their goals. Competence as a mathematician when one desires to be a world-class chef does nothing to enhance one's self-esteem according to the Jamesian view.

Framing self-esteem as competence is advantageous because of its behavioral focus. In this view, self-esteem is about action. Action is observable and measurable.

Understanding self-esteem as an action related to success or failure enables investigation, observation, and measurement. Through this lens, researchers have explored the connection between self-esteem and motivation (Mruk, 2006b, p. 12).

From the Jamesian perspective, self-esteem can also have a negative impact. It can drive individuals to seek success in ways harmful to themselves or others. Lying, cheating, bullying, and other undesirable behaviors may arise in an effort to achieve one's desired goals. Fear of failure and other negative motivators can drive individual behaviors in ways that do not contribute to healthy outcomes (Mruk, 2006a).

Self-worth. Sixty-five years after James (1890/1983) introduced the idea of self-esteem as competence, Morris Rosenberg's (1965) research on self-esteem as one's feeling of value or self-worth emerged as an alternative to James's competence view. Rosenberg's (1965) ideas dominated the literature until the late 1990s. Rosenberg's (1965) worthiness research is foundational to the more recent work of Epstein (1980), Epstein and Morling (1995), Baumeister, Boden, and Smart (1996), and Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003).

Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as an attitude and, as such, made it possible to examine self-esteem in the context of attitude formation.

Self-esteem, as noted, is a positive or negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self. High self-esteem as reflected in our scale items, expresses the feeling that one is "good enough." The individual simply feels that he is a person of worth. He respects himself for what he is, but does not stand in awe of himself nor does he expect others to consider himself superior. (p. 60)

A one-dimensional 10-item scale measures positive and negative attitudes about the self (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale was popular for many years and was used in 25% of the studies of self-esteem between 1967 and 1995 (Mruk, 2006b, p. 16). Framed as "worthiness," self-esteem enables easy research and measurement. Findings can be correlated with gender, age, race, or other similar categories. Assessment tools, like Rosenberg's (1965) have helped to make worthiness -- a favorable global evaluation of oneself -- among the most commonly used definitions of self-esteem (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003).

Through the worthiness lens, self-esteem is seen as an attitude, belief, or feeling. The emphasis is on feeling good rather than being good. Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) critically evaluate the self-esteem literature to assess whether or not high self-esteem results in positive outcomes for adolescents in school performance, job success, pro-social behavior, happiness, or health. Their exhaustive research concentrated on quantitative studies that showed objective evidence of the effects of self-esteem. These large-scale longitudinal studies rigorously examined the influence of self-esteem on personal and social performance finding no correlation between how one feels about oneself and resulting actions. When positive, a person values dignity, honor, or conscientiousness; when negative, egotism, narcissism, or a sense of superiority prevails, yet neither have been shown to influence behavior one way or the other (Baumeister et al., 2003).

Competence and self-worth. Self-esteem as an integrated concept of competence and self-worth is not new. Many researchers (Bandura, 1987; Harter, 2012; Gecas, 1982)

have offered different variations of the integrated definition of self-esteem that Nathanial

Branden (1969) popularized in his book, *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*.

> Self-esteem has two interrelated aspects: it entails a sense of personal efficacy and
> a sense of personal worth. It is the integrated sum of self-confidence and self-
> respect. It is the conviction that one is *competent* to live and *worthy* of living. (p.
> 110)

This two-dimensional understanding of self-esteem developed from Branden's objectivist

philosophical viewpoint. Objectivists believe that humans have a fundamental need to

feel worthy and can only achieve this through acting competently. Objectivism is the

philosophy of novelist and philosopher, Ayn Rand (1905-1982). Objectivism

promulgates the view that to exist is to be something—to possess a specific *identity*. The

essence of Rand's philosophy is that "man is a heroic being, with his own happiness as

the moral purpose of his life" (Rand, 2015, para. #3).

Because of its objectivist foundation, academics largely ignored the work of

Branden (1969), eschewing its philosophical point of view in favor of dual models of

self-esteem with stronger empirical connections. Researchers Tafarodi and Swann (2001),

Mruk (2006b), and Harter (2012) have dedicated much of their scholarly research to a

multi-dimensional or two-factor empirical approach to self-esteem. Their approach

enables understanding self-esteem as a more complex phenomenon, including dimensions

of competency and self-worth, and a third dimension that results from the connection

between the two. Mruk (2006a) describes this complex view of self-esteem as the balance

between "what the person does in the world and how they feel about themselves" (p. 11).

Tafarodi and Swann (2001) believe the relationship between competence and self-worth

in defining self-esteem is as fundamental as how length and width define the size of a

rectangle (p. 656).

Mruk (2006b) suggests the interplay between the two dimensions creates a co-

dependent relationship that optimizes self-esteem. Worthiness must be earned through

competent behavior and to feel competent, behavior must be worthy (p. 100). Tafarodi

and Swann (2001) describe the interplay of the elements of global self-esteem – one's

overall sense of value as a person -- using the distinction of instrumental and intrinsic

value. Instrumental value refers to what an object or person is good for, or what good it

can do. Intrinsic value refers to those qualities of an object that are considered good in

themselves (p. 654).

Two-factor theory. Susan Harter (2012) describes self-esteem as reflexive where

the domains of competence and self-worth influence self-esteem, while in turn, self-

esteem itself influences the domains of competence and self-worth. Her two-factor theory

brings together the psychological view of James (1890/1983) and social theories of

Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem. In Harter's research, the domains of competence that are

highly valued by an individual combine with that individual's social approval to produce

positive self-esteem (Harter, 2012).

Harter (2012) takes a distinctly developmental approach to self-esteem as she ties

domains of competence and self-worth to what matters to an individual at a particular

time of life. Her impressive body of research spans nearly 30 years. Her most recent book,

The Construction of the Self: Developmental and Sociocultural Foundations (2012),

summarizes her numerous scholarly articles and chapters on self-esteem. Harter has

aligned the two factors of self-esteem throughout a person's life cycle with neo-Piagetian

developmental theory, yet she maintains a less structured view than a traditional

developmental view. She insists that development does not follow a strictly linear path.

Harter's (2012) research is particularly important for this study of middle

adolescent girls. She has identified patterns of competence and self-worth most

significant to certain ages and genders, noting distinct differences between childhood,

adolescence, adulthood, and late adulthood. In middle adolescents, Harter identifies the

patterns of competence and self-worth as a *kaleidoscope* as girls shift roles and define

their self-esteem accordingly (p. 97). Within this kaleidoscope are domain-specific

competencies middle adolescent girls identify as important. They are *scholastic*

competence, athletic competence, social acceptance, physical appearance, and

behavioral conduct. Scholastic competence involves doing well at school and feeling

intelligent. Athletic competence is success and aptitude in sports. To be socially accepted

is to know how to make friends and have others like you. Physical appearance is being

happy with your overall looks. Behavioral conduct includes doing the right thing, acting

the right way, and avoiding getting into trouble.

For middle adolescent girls, Harter (2012) notes that self is distinctly different

when one looks at self with close friends, self with peers, self with parents, or self with

authority figures. Yet the competence domains remain strikingly important regardless of

the type of relationship, as they are not only important to the girls, but to each of these

others. This research on the connection of friendships and self-esteem is informed by

Harter's copious research.

The two-factor view of self-esteem provides complex understanding of a complex

topic. Self-esteem becomes more than just an emotion or attitude but a lived experience

of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. As a result, researchers can focus on real life experiences that enhance or reduce self-esteem. The interaction of the dimensions of competence and self-worth enable a much broader understanding of self-esteem. One can experience high competence, but low worthiness and so on.

This multifaceted understanding of self-esteem is suited to middle adolescence, given the decidedly intricate nature of this stage of development. Branden (2006) distilled the two components of self-esteem specifically for adolescents to self-efficacy (competence) and self-respect (self-worth). Self-efficacy is confidence in one's ability to think, learn, choose, and make good decisions. Self-respect is assurance that love, friendship, achievement, and success are natural and deserved.

Earlier in this section, Cooley's (1902) metaphor of the "looking-glass self" and the role that it plays in friendships of middle adolescent girls was referenced. Essentially the "looking-glass self" speaks to the value that girls place on the opinions of others in determining how they feel about themselves. Similar to its role in friendships, the "looking-glass self" –the internalized opinions of *others* -- preoccupies middle adolescent girls and can govern their global self-esteem. *Others* include friends, parents, and teachers as girls adopt their role-specific self or "relational self-esteem" accordingly. Understanding how a girl speaks about these different relationships is critical to understanding the context of her friendships. Culture, time, and place cannot be overlooked as they also intimately connect to the girls' stories. While context is clearly important, relational self-esteem among peers is most predictive of global self-esteem according to Harter's (2012) research: "what all of the other kids think of you is so important to how much you like yourself as a person" (p. 103).

Self-Esteem Summary

The role of self-esteem in healthy development has a long history in social science research. The two distinct dimensions of self-esteem, competence and self-worth, remain relevant in research today as separate and independent entities impacting one's overall evaluation of self. The complex multi-dimension literature of self-esteem enables a dynamic view of the interaction of the two dimensions, competence and self-worth. The interrelationship of the two dimensions focuses this research. This focus enables an understanding of how the experience of adolescent girl friendships can enhance or lessen both the competence of the participants and their feelings of worthiness.

Literature Review Summary

There are few studies that directly examine the role of friendships in self-esteem, while theoretical arguments supporting the connection of friendships and self-esteem date back to Sullivan (1953). His early conceptualization suggested friendship and self-esteem are closely intertwined. The research of Bagwell and Schmidt (2013) shows that having friends encourages self-esteem and demonstrates that adolescents with high self-esteem are more capable of establishing friendships. This study, through the narratives of middle adolescent girls, expands the literature by understanding how girls construct a relationship between their girl-to-girl friendships and their self-esteem.

Chapter Three: Methods

People live stories, and the telling of their stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 6)

In this research the relationships between girl-to-girl friendships and self-esteem is understood through the girls' experiences. Narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method, is considered one of the best ways to understand lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is a collaborative process between researcher and participants in a certain time, place, and social context. It is based on the foundation that narration is the way in which people make sense of experience, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning (Chase, 2003). The convergence of these principles enables shared experiences to create stories (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Creswell, 2007).

A social constructivist worldview underlies the approach to this study. It assumes that individuals give meaning to their experiences in a way that creates their own unique reality. Creswell (2007) defines worldview as "a basic set of beliefs that guide actions and a general orientation about the world and nature of research" (p. 6). Other researchers (Crotty, 1998; Neuman, 2000) define these beliefs as *epistemologies*, ways of giving knowledge, and *ontologies*, ways of understanding existence. Social constructivism is an epistemology that examines the development of a jointly constructed understanding of the world. Berger and Luckman (1966) introduced this concept as a way to understand how social reality is defined in relation to others.

Constructivism is based on the idea that reality is a product of one's own creation; each individual sees and interprets the world and their experiences through their personal belief systems. Narrative inquiry allows us to hear how individuals construct meaning

from within these systems of belief. Their attitudes, values, and ideas shape their sense of

self and identity. Narrative inquiry moves between the internal and external world of the

storyteller, across time, within their environments (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry provides a rich canvas for understanding how experiences influence

middle adolescent girls to construct a relationship between friendship and self-esteem.

Research Design

The research design for this study is qualitative using narrative inquiry as the

methodology. This methodology is grounded in hermeneutics, the science of meaning

making (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Chase, 2005; Josselson, 2013). Narrative inquiry

involves the gathering of stories. These stories capture personal and human dimensions

within the context of time and place (Creswell, 2007). As a research method, narrative

inquiry enables a way of thinking about and studying human experience. The roots of

narrative inquiry are found in the early work of John Dewey (1859-1952), the preeminent

thinker in education. Dewey's writing on the nature of experience is the conceptual

backdrop for Clandinin and Huber's (2010) narrative inquiry framework. This framework

specifies the dimensions of a narrative inquiry as temporality, sociality, and place. These

three dimensions are simultaneously explored in undertaking a narrative inquiry,

distinguishing this type of inquiry from other methodologies (p. 3).

In narrative inquiry, events under study are temporal. They occur for a particular

point in time for both the researcher and the participants. The autobiography of each

player in the study will be written and rewritten as life unfolds and context changes.

Awareness of the temporality of the participant's life, as well as relevant places, things,

and events is important to the success of a narrative research design (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Concurrently, the dimension of sociality must be considered in the inquiry. Sociality involves the personal conditions of the inquirer and the participant. The feelings, hopes, and disposition of the members in an inquiry must be considered, as experience and stories unfold in the psychological surroundings of inquiry. Cultural setting is included in the dimension of sociality. The cultural setting links the lives of the researcher and participant as the stories unfold (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

The third dimension of this narrative inquiry conceptual framework is place. Place is the physical locale where inquiry and events take place. The identity of the researcher and the participant are connected to experience and stories in a particular place or multiple places. Clandinin and Huber (2010) aptly note that all events *take place at some place,* and as such, it is important to recognize the role place plays in a narrative (p. 4).

Data Collection

Data in narrative inquiries are not collected through structured question-and-answer formats. More typically, like in this study, a semi-structured interview is used to gather the stories of the participants. A semi-structured interview begins with an open-ended question or prompt intended to initiate the participant's story and enable the researcher to enter into the participant's world (Josselson, 2013). The opening prompt in this study is, *Tell me about your friends.* This broad inquiry allowed the girls to begin their story where it was most personally meaningful. The prompt's general nature quickly enabled the girls to enter into their story and set the tone for an open and engaging conversation.

Semi-structured interviews have a comprehensive list of prepared questions that act as a guide to the interview as needed. This list is not a fixed interview protocol or pre-determined schedule of questions, but rather a way to frame the girls' stories in the context of friendships and self-esteem; ultimately connecting their stories to what is discussed in the literature review to answer the research question identified in this study. The follow-on prompts or questions in this interview guide were intended to lead an effortless discourse (Appendix A). *What are your friends like? What do you like about them? What do they like about you? Tell me about the best things that happen with you and your friends. What kind of problems do you deal with in regards to your friends?* There is flexibility and fluidity in a semi-structured approach that allows for adjustment of sequence or questions to adapt to what arises in the interview session. A semi-structured approach enables the interview to be shaped by the interviewee's own understanding, the researcher's interests, and unexpected discoveries (Kvale, 2007).

This data-gathering approach complements the constructivist worldview that underlies this study. The approach allowed participants to reflect on and make meaning of their everyday experiences. As the discourse unfolded, listening closely to what the girls shared enabled a deeper understanding of their friendship experiences. As these experiences developed meaning, narrative inquiry became synonymous with storytelling. A narrative study is circular; the more that is learned about the experience of participants in relation to the research question, the clearer what needs to be explored with subsequent participants becomes (Josselson, 2013). This paradox could have altered the guiding questions in this study as the interviews progressed but it did not. The flow of the interviews progressed smoothly and required little adjustment. Being able to adjust is the

challenge a researcher using narrative inquiry must be prepared for, asking good

questions that will invite a particular story, while at the same time remaining open to the

notion that a particular story in narrative inquiry cannot be predicted or prepared for in

advance (Chase, 2005, p. 662).

This research focused on the stories the adolescent girls told about themselves and

their friendships. The meaning and connections emerged from their stories. The stories of

these girls were dynamic as they shared the details of their lives. These details included

descriptions of their surroundings, their relationships, and their future dreams within the

unique place and time of their generation. Several questions were included in the

interview to use as needed to uncover how the girls feel about themselves. These

questions -- *What do you like most about yourself? When are you happiest? What are*

your hopes, dreams, and plans for the future? -- linked the girls' self-esteem narratives

with their friendship narratives and enabled connections to emerge.

Participants

There were 19 adolescent girl participants in this study. The majority of the girls

are from suburban towns outside of Boston, Massachusetts. One participant is from a

suburban town outside of Seattle, Washington. This one geographic outlier is due to the

participant recruiting strategy via Facebook. This participant heard about the study via

social networking site and enrolled. She met the study criteria and the demographics of

the community where she lives are quite similar to those of the suburban Boston towns

where most participants live.

The participants are enrolled in school with most in high school and two in middle

school. The racial background of the 19 girls is 17 Caucasian, one Middle Eastern, and

one Hispanic. This racial demographic reflects the suburban towns surrounding Boston. These towns are predominantly White middle-class communities. The girls were similar in other ways as well: Most participated in some type of extra-curricular activity, many had jobs, and most expressed a desire to continue their education beyond high school. Several participants had been accepted to college at the time of the study.

The girls volunteered for the study via a posting on Facebook (see Appendix B). The posting invited girls between the ages of 14 – 17 to participate in a 45-minute confidential interview to discuss their female friendships and importance of these friendships to them. Each of the participants seemed to have a genuine interest in discussing their friends and some level of curiosity about the research study. The participants co-signed with one of their parents or guardians, an Assent Form (see Appendix C), describing the details of the study. Each girl's parent or guardian also signed a Parent Permission Letter (see Appendix D) prior to the participant interview.

Procedures

The complexity of narrative inquiry makes it a challenging research approach. Participants are talking to a stranger about their lives. While the researcher is *doing* research; the researcher has also entered into a relationship with the participant. This relationship is foundational, as it impacted what each girl was willing to share. The researcher was mindful of each story and treated each participant with respect, tact, acceptance, and most importantly without judgment (Chase, 2005). The recruitment for the study was done using a recruitment advertisement on Facebook. Interested participants volunteered via email or text messages with the understanding that their participation was voluntary and confidential.

Anonymity is paramount throughout this research. The participants are referred to in the study by pseudonyms. To protect the anonymity of the friends discussed by the participants in each interview, a relational map was used. Each participant drew her friends as circles on a page and discussed the circles without reference to names (see Appendix E). The use of the relational map ensured the girls did not comprise confidentiality in sharing their stories. The Fielding Institutional Review Board (IRB), which provides an important level of protection to the participants, approved the study (see Appendix F). Yet, being cognizant throughout the research of the unique issues related to a narrative study was equally important to protecting the participants.

Ethics in narrative research moves beyond the limits of the IRB to a deeper responsibility of representing participants' lived and told stories respectively and conscientiously (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The study took place in the midst of the participants' middle or high school experience. Biases of the researcher in regards to her experiences in middle and high school were considered to ensure they did not impede the ability of the inquiry to "continue the conversation rather than discover the truth" (Way, 1999, p. 23). Ownership of the story is another ethical consideration in narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). While the researcher owns the story, it was imperative in this study that the researcher's voice did not obfuscate the voices of the girls.

Data Management

Careful steps were taken to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality in the data management step of this research. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and only general demographic data were shared in the study findings. Neither the name of the participants' schools nor their specific geographic locations were shared. Recordings and

corresponding typed transcripts from each interview were identified by number not by name of participant. The transcripts are stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. The recordings are protected in password-encrypted files. After 3 years, the recordings will be electronically erased and the transcripts will be shredded.

Data Analysis

The unique role that stories play in this narrative inquiry required the data analysis process to be similarly unique, yet equally robust to a traditional analytical approach. The narratives were digitally recorded and transcribed into transcripts. Once transcribed, the transcripts were read to understand and capture general themes. From there delving deeper into the data enabled understanding not only of the themes across the interviews, but the voices within the interviews (Chase, 2005). It is not just the voice within each individual story that was important to analyze. It was the relationship of the voices across the stories, including the voice of the researcher. Stories in narrative inquiry are bound by social circumstances that can be particular to the time and place of the study lending to similarities across stories (Chase, 2005). And what of the researcher's voice? The researcher's stories are present throughout the narrative, playing a role in the co-construction of the ultimate story. Since it is the researcher's voice that will tell the stories of the participants, it was also considered in the analysis.

Given the centrality of voice in the analysis, Brown and Gilligan's (1992) *Listening Guide* was used to uncover the complexity of the stories of the participants in the research. This approach parses the myriad of voices in the narrative centering on the relational aspect of this type of inquiry. Brown and Gilligan describe this as a feminist method that brings the voice of women and girls forward. Feminist research methods are

used in research projects by people who identify themselves as feminists and are used in

research published in feminist research journals (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

The Listening Guide is a method of analysis that draws on voice, resonance, and

relationship. It was designed to move beyond traditional limits of coding of qualitative

data to enable a connection to the stories of participants. Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg,

and Bertsch (2003) elegantly describe this approach to analysis "to illuminate the

complex and multi-layered nature of expression of the human experience and the

interplay between self, relationships, psyche, and culture" (p. 169).

In using *The Listening Guide*, the researcher read through the transcripts multiple

times to connect with different aspects of the story. Colored pencils were used to annotate

each reading bringing the transcripts visually to life. The reading of the interview

transcripts was active as if the researcher was listening to them. This analysis is a

recursive process of *searching, researching, and searching again* to understand the

complexity of voice and relationship in the narratives (Creswell, 2007).

The first two steps in *The Listening Guide* are prescribed. In Step 1, the researcher

listened for the plot of the story to get a sense of what happened, what stories were told,

and digest the who, what, where, and why of the narrative. This step also located the

speaker in the narrative contextually and explicitly to ensure reflection and reactions to

the story being told. How did the researcher identify with what was being said? How

were her experiences similar or different? In this step, listening for contradictions,

repeated words, or frequent images was important (Way, 1999).

Step 2 listened for the "*I*" of the participant, *the voice of her*, attending to how she

spoke of herself. Here the analysis moved beyond the recurring words or images to more

deeply connect with the participant's voice within the story. This step used the "I" poems (Debold, 1991). "I" poems were constructed by the researcher underlining every first person "I" along with the accompanying verb and any other important words, then extracting these on a sheet of paper on separate lines as if it was a poem. The poem allowed access to a range of themes and situational positioning. For example, when the girl spoke of herself was it active or passive, was it positive or negative? What commonalities in voice emerge as the story unfolded (Brown & Gilligan, 1992)?

Together the first and second reading allowed listening and responding to the girls' stories of friendships and self-esteem. The third step listened for contrapuntal voices, the multiple facets of stories being told. Here, the stories were connected to the research question being explored. For example, did the connections of friendship and self-esteem seem favorable or unfavorable? Reading through the transcript in this step highlighted favorable voices and the next read through identified unfavorable voices, color coding accordingly. These color codes enabled a visual view of the relationship between the voices, which was then linked back to the themes in the "I" poems.

The final step, to ensure a comprehensive analysis, was to create the narrative summaries of the themes that emerged from each interview. These summaries preserved the story that was told while reducing the stories to be more manageable. An individual interview had many themes or only a few. Using quotes in these summaries kept the voices of the girls present. Once the summaries were done, a matrix was used to capture the common themes, repeated phrases, terms, or concepts. After this was completed for each interview, the researcher looked across the interviews to uncover the patterns by topic or within topics. Summarizing the themes in this manner is a slight departure from

the traditional listening guide, but was important to ensure both the voices and the depth of the themes in each story were captured.

By the final step in the analysis, the transcripts were read four times: one for plot, one to understand the "I" and twice to look at the multiple threads of voices and their possible connection to each other and the research question. The themes were summarized into tables for synthesis, compilation, and further analysis. This enabled understanding the relationship among the multiple interviews, illuminating the similarities, differences, and findings relative to the research question.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to test the research design and understand how the data collection and analysis processes outlined earlier in this chapter supported answering the research question: *How do adolescent girls construct a relationship between their girl-to-girl friendships and their self-esteem?* Three 16-year-old girls were interviewed for the pilot study. The 19 participants in the final study did not include these three participants. Several important themes emerged from the data.

The importance of friends to the participants featured prominently in their stories. Each of the girls described the major role of their girl-to-girl friendships, framing stories of their social lives, their school lives, and their overall happiness in the context of these friendships. All three participants discussed the value of their "friend group" and the various roles individual friends play within the group and in relationship with the participant. The traits of the friends discussed in each story share the common characteristics of friendships outlined in the friendship literature -- intimacy, similarity,

and mutual responsiveness. The "dark side" of friendship emerged as a theme in each story, subtle in two stories, more directly in one.

Links to the elements of self-esteem important to the research occurred in the pilot study findings. In particular, the domains of competence identified by Harter (2012) as important to middle adolescent girls were noticeably present in each participant's story. These competence areas, scholastic competence, athletic competence, social acceptance, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct appeared with various emphases, yet they all featured as important. As the girls discussed their friendships, the domains emerged effortlessly. The girls' stories of school, sports, social activities, behavior, and appearance intertwined with the stories of their friends such that they became nearly one in the same story. These domains provided the context for girl-to-girl friendships for these participants. And it is in this context that a clear sense of each participant's self was visible, illuminating the connection of friendship and self-esteem.

The pilot findings show clear connection between the girls' friendships and the foundational elements of self-esteem -- competence and self-worth. The girls shared examples that reinforce how friendships enhanced their life experience and contribute to their overall positive self-evaluation or "global self-esteem." Competence and self-worth are the underlying dimensions of self-esteem that enable a connection to life experiences that enhance or lessen how efficacious and valuable one feels (Mruk, 2006b). The girls in the pilot demonstrated self-efficacy and self-worth throughout their narratives.

The final element of self-esteem important to the research, relational self-esteem, was visibly absent in the girls' stories. The literature discussed in Chapter 2 ascertains that relational self-esteem; the opinion of others -- friends, peers, family, and authority

figures -- has a significant influence on the self-esteem of middle-adolescent girls. This influence can positively or negatively impact a girl's sense of self. It was important in the final study to understand why relational self-esteem did not play a role in the pilot study findings. Did the results of the pilot indicate an empirical difference from the established literature or was it a methodological oversight in the design of the questions?

To more fully explore this important issue, the interview questions were modified to include several relational self-esteem questions in the dissertation study. The additional questions are based on the research of Du, Chi, and King (2012), Harter (2012), Harter, Waters, and Whitesell (1998), and Heatherton and Polivy (1991), which expanded the early work of Harter (1993) and Rosenberg (1965) to directly assess relational self-esteem with context-specific questions to discern the role of *others* in adolescents' opinion of themselves.

These four new questions expand the pilot questions in the final study to include specific questions on self-worth and the opinion of others. The first additional question is, *Tell me when you feel best about yourself.* A follow-up question to this was used as needed to probe the participant as to when she may feel less valuable -- *When do you not feel good about yourself?* Understanding the stories that emerged in response to these questions enabled an insight into friends' impact on participants' self-worth.

If the two added questions did not clarify the role others play in shaping how the participants feel about themselves, more direct probing was used -- *How does what others (e.g., friends, peers, family, and authority figures) think of you impact how you feel about yourself?* This probing teased out examples of interpersonal context to discern the impact of the opinion of *others.* Lastly, as needed, this question was included -- *How*

would others (e.g., peers, family, and authority figures) describe you? How would they describe your friends?

An additional change to the interview questions for the final study involved the inclusion of a few icebreaker questions. Understanding some basic information about the participants at the onset of the interview was a missed opportunity in the pilot study. With the final participants, it is essential that this connection be established early in the session to facilitate an easy conversation. See the full list of pilot interview questions and the revised questions in Appendix G and A respectively.

Chapter Four: Findings

During sports, if we are having a good game, I feel really good. In school if I do well on something, I feel good and the same with friends. If we are having a good week, then I feel good about myself. (Caitlin, age 17)

Participants

Nineteen adolescent girls participated in the study in response to a recruiting poster shared on Facebook. The majority of the girls are from suburban towns of Boston, Massachusetts with one exception. One participant is from a suburban town of Seattle, Washington. The participants are enrolled in school with 17 in high school and two in middle school. Seventeen of the girls are Caucasian, one is Middle Eastern, and one is Hispanic. The ages of the participants range from 14 to 17 and are summarized in Table 1.

Thirteen of the participants live in two-parent homes. Four of the participants live in single-parent homes. Of these four participants, two lost a parent to death, one lives with a guardian, and one lives with her single mom. The remaining two girls are from divorced families and currently live with one of their biological parents and a stepparent. Interests outside of school for these girls varied widely. Many play sports; some like to dance, and some pursue theater or other creative outlets. Some work part-time jobs cashiering, baby-sitting, or serving ice cream. Academic performance mattered to the majority of the girls and nearly all of them plan to go to college in the future.

Table 1

Participant Statistics

Age	Number of Participants	Percent
14	2	11%
15	3	16%
16	5	26%
17	9	47%

Findings

The narratives explored in this study demonstrate the importance of girl-to-girl friendships and the ways in which girls construct the connection between their friendships and their self-esteem. Please see the data associated with the themes that emerged from the participants' stories in Appendix H. Eight themes emerged, however four key themes most directly illustrate the connection between friendships and self-esteem in middle adolescent girls and stand as the main findings of this study.

First, *the role of others in how middle adolescent girls feel about themselves* shows a link between friendship and self-esteem. Second, *participants' successful navigation of the darker side of friendship* enhances self-worth and enables the selection of higher quality friends. Third, *higher quality friends positively influence participants' self-esteem*. Lastly, participants' self-esteem is reinforced through *success in school, sports, and social interactions, which are closely connected to participants' friendships*.

The role of others in the girls' sense of self. The stories of the girls in the study reflect a mixed view of how they felt about themselves based on what others think of them. Some of the participants are sensitive to what others think about them, while others

are not. The data showed that even when sensitive, most participants did not let the

opinions of others materially diminish their overall self-esteem. The participants most

often described *others* as friends or peers. Occasionally, *others* included an authority

figure such as a teacher or coach.

Middle adolescent girls care about what their friends and peers think about them.

The impact of the opinions varied among the participants. When the impact was visible in

a participant, it was almost always in the worthiness dimension of self-esteem in contrast

to the competence dimension. The affected participants described a diminished sense of

personal worth, feeling badly as a result of the opinion of others. It is important to note

that in most cases where a participant's worthiness was impacted, the competence

dimension of her self-esteem or her overall ability to achieve her goals did not appear to

be affected. The opinion of others did not deter most of the participants' success

scholastically, athletically, or socially.

Several of the girls described how little value they place on the opinion of others.

Jackie (age 14) spoke clearly about how the opinions of others impact her feelings about

herself:

> Most people, I don't really care what they think about me, like that's their opinion.
>
> It doesn't really matter to me. What matters to me is that I tell the truth and
>
> sometimes this causes others to not think good of me; but to me telling the truth is
>
> more important than what others think of me.

Colleen (age 15) shared – "at the end of the day it only matters what I think about

myself." Colleen seemed confident in this description:

> I like myself, I like how creative I am, I like how tall I am, I like my taste in
>
> music. School has always come easy for me. So sometimes girls are like jealous
>
> of me or whatever and can be mean. I would rather just be alone than deal with
>
> that girl drama.

Kelsey (age 17) said,

> I just don't worry what others think of me, it is what they think, not what I think. I
>
> feel self-confident and beautiful and don't worry about other girls anymore. I
>
> worried when I was younger, but now I am like…who cares, that is about them,
>
> not me.

Many of the girls in the study shared stories similar to Kiley (age 16). They

discussed examples of demonstrable success in school, sports, and socially emphasizing

their competence; while at the same time stating that their sense of worthiness was

impacted by how others viewed them. Kiley described many positive friendships, success

in school and sports, and a close connection to her community through fundraising and

event planning. Yet, she highlighted,

> What others think about me impacts me a lot, when someone says something bad
>
> about me, like it lowers my self-esteem. I know that this shouldn't happen, but it
>
> does. I could get a thousand compliments and one bad thing sticks and the
>
> compliments don't matter anymore.

Kiley emphasized the "one bad thing sticks," yet it did not impede her many

accomplishments.

Meryl (age 16) and Amanda (age 17) describe themselves as "people pleasers."

Meryl said, "What others think about me affects me a lot, I want to please people or I feel

bad about myself. If someone doesn't like me, I worry about it." Amanda echoed this – "I

am people pleaser. I want to be seen positively in the eyes of others, especially people I

respect a lot." Meryl and Amanda shared their worry about the opinion of friends and

peers, yet it does not hold them back. Meryl is an accomplished dancer; works part-time

as a cashier, has a solid grade point average, and has clear goals around college. Amanda

plays a leadership role on three sport teams, babysits, and spends time volunteering with

sick children, a topic she discussed with great enthusiasm.

Bella (age 17) said, "I like being friends with everyone and try to match positive

energy with positive energy," she noted that she becomes distracted by what friends at

school think about her. She has a friend she knows she should no longer be a friend with

as the relationship "drains me of energy and makes me feel bad," yet she is concerned

about how others will view her if she ends this relationship saying, "I don't want to be

viewed badly by others at school." While Bella disclosed that friends' opinions bother her,

she was recently accepted to a prestigious college, she works three jobs so "I can save

every paycheck to support myself in college," and she co-captains her sports team.

Arianna (age 17) and Laura (age 15) were exceptions to the broader population.

Both seem to let the opinion of others influence them to a point where it impacts both

their worthiness, how they feel about themselves and their competence, and how they

behave. Arianna struggles to be socially accepted at school:

> What others think of me matters a lot and makes me very self-consciousness. I am
>
> always conscious of what others in school think of me. If I think others are going
>
> to criticize me, I don't speak up in class. I try to avoid being noticed.

Laura (age 15) has struggled to get her confidence back since a friend ended their friendship last year. "Ever since I got ditched by my best friend, I started to care a lot, a lot, about what others think of me." Laura described that while she has some new friends, she doesn't know if she can trust them, "I am distrustful and am like more secluded now; so that I don't have to feel bad about what others think of me."

These findings confirm a connection of middle adolescent girls' friendships to their self-esteem. Interestingly, this connection seems dominant in one dimension of self-esteem, worthiness. For most participants, the competence dimension of self-esteem did not appear influenced by the opinions of others. This suggests that diminished worthiness did not impact the girls' confidence in their dreams, decisions, or accomplishments.

Growth and development through the dark side of friendships. As the relationship between friends and self-esteem became visible in the girls' stories, experience with the dark side of friendship emerged. In the dark side, friends are typically a source of anxiety, competition, or jealousy. Every girl in the study experienced some element of the dark side of girl-to-girl friendships. The participants cited experiences with the break-up of friend groups, abandonment by close friends, jealously over boys or other girls, and encounters with relational aggression or *mean girls*. These negative experiences were powerful. Yet, most of the participants told stories of emerging from these entanglements with a greater sense of personal value and felt motivated to select higher quality future friends. Whitney (age 17) shares how she got stronger as a result of challenges with friends:

I haven't had the best luck with friend groups in the past. One group broke up in middle school and one in sophomore year of high school. I was traumatized and a

mess both times, but I am now over holding grudges and keeping bridges burned. I choose to be friendly with everyone, even those who were part of the drama in the past. But my close friends now I chose because of my shared and different interests with each of them. We do different things together depending on the friend. I really like that. I am actually a lot more confident now because of what I went through with the friend breakups.

The bright side of the dark side. Conflict appears to benefit some girls' friendships. It seems that adolescent girls successfully work through challenges with their friends; they strengthen their sense of self and their friendships. Meryl (age 16) has a friend group of three; she conveyed that she and her friends have an agreement to not let conflicts disrupt their relationship:

> Conflict is minor with our group; we get on each other's nerves but it doesn't really matter. We are a tight group. We deal with issues quickly or it just doesn't even become an issue. We have an understanding that one day someone might make you mad or irritated and you just move on; it is not an issue; it just happens in the group and no one holds a grudge.

Casey (age 17) said her friend group deals with disagreements quickly, "we are so close and see each other so much that any issues we have are usually pretty minor and get resolved within two days tops." Similarly, for Colleen (age 15), her group of three friends sometimes has small skirmishes where they get annoyed with each other but "never anything we can't work out quickly."

Lisa (age 16) experienced several friend group breakups. She shares stories of much drama with friends in high school, yet she appeared stronger as a result:

I now have three one-on-one friendships that are based on the different interests I

have. No more friend groups. I am actually more confident about who I am than a

lot people I know. I don't want to keep busy being pissed off and mad so now I

am friendly with everyone including the former friends, but I just hang out with

my three close friends. It is more fun that way. I feel more supported too.

For Kelsey (age 17) the friend drama she experienced in middle school strengthened her

comfort about having one best friend.

I don't surround myself with groups of girls. I find it overwhelming. I prefer one

close best friend that I communicate easily with and resolve any drama

immediately. In middle school, the girls just did not have my back. They were

disloyal and I was not able to deal with that. My best friend and I understand each

other and have each other's back. I am content with this.

Amanda (age 17) described two incidents, one where her friend group split in half and the

other when a friend from the remaining group decided to move on to other friends.

I am in a much better situation with the two friends I have now. We have the same

interests and values and no drama. The other girls had different interests and there

was jealously over boys and other petty stuff that made it clear that we had to go

our separate ways. Now I know I have my friends for life who support me and

make me feel good about myself.

Negative impact of the dark side. While many of the girls in the study drew

strength from tangling with the dark side of friendship, several of the girls experienced

vulnerability, insecurity, and self-consciousness resulting from their challenges. Jackie

(age 14) seemed overwhelmed as she shared:

I feel like I have no friends anymore because I don't know if I can trust anyone.

Two friends in my group have been doing anything to get attention from a couple

of boys and have been talking behind my back, saying things that aren't true and

behaving like jerks. They have left out the rest of us and now we don't really have

a friend group and it is terrible. It is torture going to school because I don't even

know who to sit with at lunch.

Laura (age 15) was near tears as she talked about her former best friend abandoning her

for the popular girls at the beginning of freshman year:

I have fake friends, you know, the mean ones. My best friend ditched me and

another friend to be friends with the popular girls. She pretends to be nice to me,

but is not. I hate it. I am not as outgoing now. I am more quiet and less social. I

had to go to guidance a lot to get help from my counselor.

Caitlin (age 17) described her experience with the dark side of friendship:

I have been consumed by drama with my friends since the beginning of junior

year. I worry about it constantly. I have known this group of three friends since I

was little. I grew up with them and now someone is always fighting with someone.

There is competition and secrets which all started because of one girl. Everything

just got ruined because she tried to break up the group. Now other extended friend

groups don't want us around because this girl is such a bitch. I just don't know

what to do. I just stay home most of the time on the weekend.

Caitlin (age 17) continued with

I am a loyal person and I feel like I have to stay with this group of friends. I feel

like it is my job to take care of the group. I don't want other friends to think I am

a girl who walks away when things get hard, yet this has ruined my junior year

and I am scared and I don't want it to ruin my senior year.

Dark side conflicts were tangible in the narratives of many participants in the

study. The data indicate that successfully navigating the dark side positively impacts the

self-confidence and worthiness of many of the participants. In many cases, self-

confidence seemed strengthened from the ability to successfully deal with conflict. The

participants felt more worthy as a result of their experience, valuing themselves more.

This greater sense of self-worth and value empowered the participants to choose

higher quality friends. Choosing higher quality friendships meant choosing friends who

possess the underlying characteristics of affirming relationships, intimacy, similarity, and

mutual responsiveness. This conscious choice or competence to make this decision along

with their enhanced worthiness further supports the links in this research of how middle

adolescent girls' friendships connect to their self-esteem. Bella (age 17) reinforced this:

My friends give me more confidence and energy. We are insanely close and share

everything. I mean every little secret. We are always there for each other, and are

so similar in how we think about things, what makes us laugh, and what we like to

do. I feel better about myself because of my friends.

Linking friendship characteristics to self-esteem. Intimacy, similarity, and

mutual responsiveness are the foundational characteristics of girl friendships in

adolescence. Friendships have been shown to play a positive role in the development of

adolescents. The girls in this study, without exception, have girl-to-girl friendships they

care deeply about. The data show the preponderance of participants possesses an

integrated sense of self-esteem, a balance of competence and self-worth. Their stories

conveyed a positive mix of self-confidence and self-respect. Erica's (age 16) professional

goal is to become a doctor and travel to third world countries to work with poor people

without medical access. She spoke with determination as she outlined her path toward

this goal, which starts this summer with two internships:

> I have been accepted to work at two hospitals this summer, which will help my
>
> application to college and get me on the path to medical school. I will shadow one
>
> doctor in one of the internships and will work with children in the other. It will be
>
> a lot of work but I am used to working hard. The program I am in now in high
>
> school counts toward college credits, which is so much work but worth it. I feel
>
> good about myself when I am working hard.

Casey (age 17) wants to be a medical researcher studying cancer at a premier medical

hospital in Boston. She was accepted into a competitive pre-med undergraduate program

this fall. She described how she goes above and beyond in her studies:

> When I have an assignment, I don't just do the assignment, I go on-line and do
>
> research to understand more about what I was suppose [sic] to learn. I then email
>
> or talk to my teachers about what I found so that I can really get into the
>
> conversation with them. I get energized from this extra effort. I have already
>
> figured out that I want to focus on this really specific course of study in college so
>
> I can work in Boston, because you know it is Boston, and where else would I
>
> want to work as a medical person?

Bella (age 17) has been accepted to a school where she hopes to be fast tracked to a role

in the media industry, achieving a master's degree in 4 years. She said,

> I got accepted to all the schools I applied to but this is the one I am most excited
>
> about; it is a 3 + 1 program so I will finish with a master's degree. There is a cool
>
> 6-month internship too, which is mandatory and will give me experience in what I
>
> want to do when I graduate. I worked hard for this goal and it paid off.

Most of the participants shared big dreams in their narratives, encouraged, and motivated

by the support they get from their friends.

For Annie (age 15), her friends give her the "confidence to be different." She

describes her two close friends:

> We are atypical eighth graders; we are so similar and like alternative music,
>
> comics, arts, and adventure movies. We are happy to just stay in on a Friday night
>
> and listen to music or watch something unusual on Netflix. Before these friends, I
>
> felt very different. I was shy and self-conscious. Now, I can be me because of my
>
> friends, I trust them for real and they make me very happy. They are fun to be
>
> around and are hilarious.

Bella (age 17) said with a smile on her face,

> I can't help but love myself more because some of the girls in my group of friends
>
> are so confident, it rubs off on me. There are a lot of us; we are like
>
> interchangeable. We talk every day. We text, email, snap chat, instant message,
>
> whatever. We share everything and are always there for each other.

Erica (age 16) describes how when she wants something she goes for it, particularly in

school. "If I want a good grade, I work for it." She described her friends' role in her

success:

We share similar values and think about things in the same way. We love to just

hang out and talk and laugh for hours. My friends support my goals and me and

love me even though I am kind of different. This keeps the drama in my life to a

minimum because I don't have any interest in friend drama. Friendships should be

about making someone happier not making life harder.

Casey (age 17) has two close friends that she describes as similar to her and each

other. "We share the same interests, all our secrets, and are always there for each other.

We are each other's support system. I would rather have a close connection to my two

friends than have a lot of friends." Casey "wants to make stuff happen," whether it be in

school, sports, her health and fitness, or exploring her many intellectual curiosities. She

described her enthusiasm for life:

I am always talking to people; I am curious. I want to get to know people and am

always asking questions. Even at work when I am waiting on people, I am excited

to talk to them and see if I can get them to talk to me about their interests. My

boss laughs at me. It doesn't matter if I am at work or at the gym or at school, I

always want to learn and want to engage with others. It gives me energy.

As she continued, the importance in her life of her two friends was reinforced:

We do everything together. We are always over each other's house, spending the

entire weekends together, talking for hours and finishing each other's sentences. I

can have really deep conversations with these two about stuff that matters,

intellectual stuff that I care about and they really listen and care too. This

motivates me.

Amanda (age 17) also has a small group of two close friends. She called them her tribe, and emphasized that she is quite content that it is just the three of them. She said,

> We are all very similar. We are content to just be in each other's company. My friends are hilariously funny and very supportive of each other. They are good listeners and we have a very deep-level connection. We share everything. My friends are very intelligent.

Amanda demonstrated resilience and self-efficacy:

> I made a decision to leave my parents and my brothers and sisters and live with a relative a couple of years ago. I am the oldest and my parents are very immature and didn't take good care of my four siblings or me. I don't respect them and did not think I would be able to be successful in school or life if I stayed in that situation. Thank goodness for my friends, I respect them more than I do my parents. I work very hard because of this choice I made. I have a job and I volunteer to make a difference to other teenagers who are in the same situation. I work very hard in school. I have been accepted to college. I feel really good about myself when I make a goal for myself and accomplish it.

The self-affirming, self-disclosing, high-quality friendships described by participants demonstrate how middle adolescent girls develop trust, acceptance, and a sense of being understood through their friends. The friends discussed in the study praise each other's success and encourage each other after failures. This support seems to facilitate a mutual desire in the girls to do well and achieve, while the unconditional acceptance by friends appears to build the girls' confidence. In parallel, the emotional bond that links the girls enhances their sense of being someone of value. This important

interrelationship between competence, self-worth, and friendships underscores a key

finding of this study showing how these girls construct a relationship between their

friendships and their self-esteem.

The impact of middle adolescent girls' competence domains on self-esteem.

The relationship between friendships and self-esteem in middle adolescent girls is further

reinforced through the dynamic connection of friends to the things that matter most to the

girls beyond their friends. These *things* are domain-specific competence areas. They are

identified in Harter's (2012) research as central to self-esteem in adolescent girls and

include *scholastic competence, athletic competence, social acceptance, physical*

appearance, and *behavioral conduct.* Many of these competence areas featured

prominently in each participant's story. As the girls described their friendships in their

narratives, the various domains emerged naturally. In every story of friends, one or more

of the domains was visible. So much so that at times, there was little distinction between

the domains and the friendships, as if they were one and the same.

Scholastic, athletic, and social competence were most prevalent in the narratives,

with many girls connecting success in these areas to a positive sense of self. Behavioral

conduct was mentioned on several occasions, typically in the context of doing the right

thing or the importance of shared values of friends. Physical appearance featured briefly

in a couple of the narratives. Caitlin (age 17) captures the essence of the link between

friends and the foremost domains:

> During sports, if we are having a good game, I feel really good. In school if I do
>
> well on something, I feel good and the same with friends. If we are having a good
>
> week, then I feel good about myself.

Whitney (age 17) confirmed this sentiment, "sports, school, and friends make me feel good about myself." Megan (age 15) described the interrelationship of school, sports, and her friends:

> My friends are always laughing and having a good time together; they make me happy. Most of us are on the same teams together and we are always together in school. On the weekends, we hang out and play sports outside or just watch a movie and be together. I look forward to going to school on Monday. I love the summer, but the school year when I am playing sports and being with my friends is everything to me.

Meredith (age 17) also talked about school and sports:

> I don't always do as good in school as my friends so when I do, it makes me feel good. I am really good at sports however, and that matters to me a lot and helps me feel good about myself.

Scholastic. In stories where only one competence area was mentioned, it was typically scholastic competence. Doing well in school and being viewed as intelligent were important to the girls in the study. Nearly all of the girls said they aspire to successful college and professional careers. School is where they spend much of their time with their friends, at lunch, in classes, or just laughing in the hallway. School facilitates these relationships.

Motivation to do well in school was a common bond or similarity described by many of the girls as important in their friendships. Kiley (age 16) discussed her drive around school with an air of self-assurance:

I work hard and make it happen. School is important to me; I love it and want to

do well so I can get in to a good college. If I think a test is going to be hard for me,

I like study for hours to get a good grade. My friends work hard too and totally

support and get that I am a study geek.

Kirsten (age 17) shared, "I feel really, really good about myself when I do good [sic] on

my grades. I usually run and tell my friends right away. I know they will be happy for

me." Similarly, with Ella (age 17) who said, "at school when I am doing really well, I

feel good about myself." Erica (age 17) talked about school with a sense of pride:

School is really important to me. I study hard and so do most of my friends. I feel

really good when I succeed, which is most of the time because it is important to

me to have a good career and life and school is important to these things.

Casey (age 17) has goals that required her to be accepted to a top college. She takes her

drive to "do really, really well" in school to the next level, always going "above and

beyond the assignment to understand its purpose and learn more than required on a given

topic." Her friends share her curiosity and she likes that they are "deep like her."

Athletic. Athletic competence was most frequently mentioned after scholastic

competence. Doing well at sports or dance and being recognized for the achievement was

important to many of the girls in the study. Like school, sports and dance provides a

social environment for the girl's friendships to grow and develop. A connection of friends

and sports was made frequently. Lisa (age 16) is driven to be a successful athlete:

I feel best about myself when I am dancing or playing sports with my friends.

Being a good athlete is important to me. I work hard, train, and practice with my

friends on the team. I want to be recruited to play in college. But dance is my

happy place. I can't wait to get there every week and dance my heart out with my

dance friends.

Megan (age 15) described the impact of sports play on how she feels about herself:

I feel really, really good when I make a good play in sports. My friends all play

sports and that is my life. We spent all of our time together. A big part of my life

is sports and that is why it is so important. I mean, school matters, but not as

much as sports. I get to see and be with my friends when I play and I don't know

what I would do without that.

Casey (age 17) values athletic success in and of itself, but more important to her is being

part of a team:

I joined the team so I could feel part of something. The team created a community

of friends for me. Doing well as part of the team is very uplifting. We cheer each

other on and that really makes me feel good. I am always yelling from the

sidelines and supporting good plays to make my team members feel good.

Ella (age 17) discussed her sports friends at length; athletics played a pivotal role in her

story. She plays three varsity sports and is determined to succeed in high school sports

but also at the college level. Ella connects success in sports to how she feels about herself

noting,

During games, if we are having a really good game, I feel really good. If I am

doing well, I feel even better. I want my team members to think I am a good team

player and my coaches too. I have other friends but my sports friends are most

important to me. I am happy when I am with them on and off the field.

Social acceptance. For most of the girls, social context was foundational in the stories of their friendships. The importance of friends and the social activities that they shared together was interwoven into healthy, happy stories of high school life for most of the participants. There was variation to this generally positive thread in several cases where the girls struggled for social acceptance either within their own friend group or beyond. Two examples stood out.

> Megan (age 15) is struggling with the unwritten rules of her group of six friends: My friends are really tight and I would be lost without them, I would not know what to do. They are the center of my universe. I feel bad because one girl that was my friend for a long time was kicked out of our group for being jealous and paranoid. I still like her but I can't hang out with her because my other friends might not understand and I can't risk being kicked out.

Arianna (age 17) has two close friends. Beyond these two friends, she is anxious about friendships, particularly at school:

> I really want to fit in at school, I am very conscious of what other kids think of me. I am totally different from class to class depending on who is in the class. I have the same teacher for two classes. My friends are in one of the classes and there I am talkative and fun. I worry about what the kids in the other class are going to say about me so in that class I don't know if I have even said anything. I have no idea what the teacher must think. I am so different from class to class.

Physical appearance. Being happy with how one looks did not play a major role in many of the girls' stories. Annie (age 15) and Kirsten (age 17) both mentioned their looks as important in how they feel about themselves, yet neither spent much time on this

topic. Annie (age 15) said, "I feel good when someone pays me a compliment. I care about how I look and I like it when it is acknowledged." Kirsten (age 17) said, "I like to dress up and look nice when I go to school, it makes me feel good." These comments did not connect in any obvious way to their friendships.

Behavioral. Several of the girls mentioned good behavior as important. How they behave, doing the right thing, avoiding trouble, and having friends who do the same played a role in a handful of the stories. Casey (age 17) described behaviors as important to her:

> I am not big on partying. I would rather hang in and bake and watch a movie. My friends are the same. It is why we are so close. I want friends who like to do the same things as me and are willing to be goofy one minute and engage in intellectual conversations the next.

Caitlin (age 17) strives to be a role model:

> It is really important for me to do the right thing. I am always polite to parents and have really good manners. I want parents and teachers and my coaches to see me as a really good kid. I don't want to get in any teenage trouble because I want to be a role model to the kids I babysit and coach. I worry what would happen if I got in trouble so I try hard to be a good kid.

Erica (age 17) shared that she chooses friends with similar values:

> I had some friends that definitely were not raised like me. It was weird because they were so loud and didn't have manners when they came into my house. I think it is important for friends to think about these things kind of the same. I mean not exactly the same, but it is important to have respect and see these things similarly.

As the girls discussed their friendships, the domains of competence surfaced effortlessly. School, sports, and social activities provide the context for the girls' friendships. These domains enable common interests, facilitate time together, and surround the many challenges and opportunities girls face in middle adolescence. The narrative of every participant was a mix of school, sports, and social events tightly intertwined with their friendships. Friendships bring these domains to life, further emphasizing how participants' self-esteem was constructed through and as part of these friendships.

Summary of Findings

This study on friendships and self-esteem focused on middle adolescent girls because it is during this pivotal period of development that friends play an important role in helping each other navigate the critical developmental steps of this growth phase. Success in school and socially are two fundamentally important steps of this developmental phase. It is apparent in the findings that success in school, socially, and in athletics is closely connected to the interrelationship of girl-to-girl friendships and self-esteem.

The findings corroborate the importance of friends to middle adolescent girls. Nearly every girl in the study described the major role girl-to-girl friendships play in their lives and in their general wellbeing. Many of the girls in the study surround themselves with a group of friends, while others intentionally have a variety of individual or one-on-one relationships. A single best friend appeared in only one or two stories. The data in this study indicate that quality of friends is more important than type of friend. This was evident by the frequency in which the highly valued attributes of friends -- intimacy,

similarity, and mutual responsiveness – were cited as differentiators in the girl-to-girl friendships, regardless of the type of friend.

A demonstrable link between self-esteem and girl-to-girl friendships and its intricate interrelationship was reinforced through the key findings of the study. This link emerged as the worthiness dimension of self-esteem became visible in the girls' narratives on how the opinion of others impacted their opinion of themselves. The study indicated that successfully traversing the dark side of friendship led to growth and development for most of the girls. It bolstered their sense of worthiness and aided them in making stronger and better choices in friends going forward.

The emergence of friendships defined by intimacy, similarity, and mutual responsiveness highlighted the central finding of the study showing how girls construct the relationship between their friendships and their self-esteem. The findings indicate that high-quality friendships enabled the participants to be accepted, understood, and supported, illustrating the fundamental link between the girls' sense of competence and self-worth -- their self-esteem -- and their friendships. This finding was underscored further as the data linked how positive girl-to-girl friendships and success in school, sports, and socially influenced the participants' self-esteem.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

The experience of self-affirming, self-disclosing friendships holds the potential for adolescents to develop a sense of importance, trust, acceptance, and of being understood. (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005, p. 2).

Middle adolescence can be a challenging time for girls; many girls struggle to maintain their self-esteem. They worry about acceptance, academic success, athletic capabilities, and their social status. It is a time when girls seek independence and strive to find their voice while simultaneously navigating numerous social and cultural obstacles (Brown & Lamb, 2006). Concurrently, girl-to-girl friendships become increasingly important and influential (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013). The significance of these friendships and the critical role of self-esteem in healthy development reinforce the value of this study in creating further understanding of – *How adolescent girls construct a relationship between their girl-to-girl friendships and their self-esteem?* – the key question in this research.

Implications

This study and accompanying review of the literature suggests that self-esteem builds as friends foster competence and feelings of worthiness through reciprocal affirmation, support, and acceptance. Positive self-esteem at this developmentally significant point in time for middle adolescents may influence growth into healthy adulthood (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Brown & Lamb, 2006; Burke & Cast, 2002).

The friendship literature reviewed for this study points to the impact friends have on social competence, conflict management, engagement, and relationship quality in adolescence. A multitude of studies suggest that the confidence that results from friendships goes beyond socio-emotional health to helping adolescent girls mitigate

developmental risk factors like poor parent relationships, harsh home environments, and peer violence (Gauze et al., 1996; Labile et al., 2000; Rubin et al., 2006; Schwartz et al., 2000).

The literature suggests self-esteem is an integrated concept of competence and self-worth. In this view, self-esteem is the totality of one's combined sense of self-confidence and self-respect. Looking at self-esteem through this two-dimensional model, enabled an understanding of how middle adolescent girls demonstrate the interrelationship of what they do (their competence) with how they feel about themselves (their self-worth); (Branden, 1969; Harter, 2012; Mruk, 2006b). This lens enabled an understanding of how friendships might influence both dimensions of self-esteem. The two-dimensional view provided an ability to look beyond the emotions or attitudes of how the girls felt about themselves to their actions or experiences that enhanced or reduced their self-esteem.

Embedded in the friendship and self-esteem literature is the suggestion that adolescent friendships contribute to positive self-esteem. Yet few studies make this connection explicitly (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013) or explore the underlying processes and dimensions at play in this relationship. There is also little research that looks at the multiple dimensions of self-esteem to see how friendships may interact with one, the other, or both. This lack of data emphasizes the importance of this study in understanding how and in what ways middle adolescent girls' friendships influence their self-esteem.

The role of others in girls' sense of self. This study corroborates that the opinion of friends and peers matters to middle adolescent girls. This finding is generally compatible with the literature reviewed for this study, however some differences are

notable. Azmitia's (2001) research found self-esteem in adolescents to be constructed

from their perception of how others see them. Azmita's findings support the foundational

research of Cooley (1902), who described the "looking glass self" as a metaphor for

one's perception of self, being dependent on the thoughts of others. Harter (2012)

reinforced this research, underscoring that the opinion of others is of utmost importance

to middle adolescent girls and that one's self-esteem is directly linked to the perception of

others.

Most participants expressed some degree of vulnerability to what others think

about them. The extent of the vulnerability varied, which is a departure from the literature.

The literature indicates a stronger and more direct tie of adolescents' perceptions of self

to the perceptions others have of them (Azmitia, 2001; Harter, 2012). Only two

participants in the study reported emotional distress resulting from the opinion of others

that impacted their feelings of self-esteem. These participants felt badly about themselves

and their behavior changed as a result. For most participants, negative opinions left them

feeling less worthy, but they did not report a change in how they behaved or acted

consequentially. Several participants shared that the opinion of others had little to no

impact on how they feel about themselves.

The negligible impact to the behavior reported by most participants suggests the

competence dimension of self-esteem was not adversely affected by the opinion of others.

Participants' ability to choose, make good decisions, and succeed did not appear affected

by the opinion of others, even when their feelings of worthiness were vulnerable to others'

opinions. Self-esteem for this study is defined as a sense of personal efficacy and a sense

of personal worth. It is the integrated sum of self-confidence and self-respect, the

conviction that one is *competent* to live and *worthy* of living (Branden, 1969, p. 110).

Branden's (1969) integrated definition of self-esteem is based on the co-

dependent interplay between the two dimensions, competence and self-worth. This

study's findings did not appear to support co-dependency of the two dimensions. While

feelings of worthiness seemed vulnerable to the opinions of others, personal competence

did not seem similarly susceptible. Many stories of accomplishments in school, sports,

and with their friends reinforced the participants' competence and capabilities, even if

their sense of worthiness was compromised.

This finding challenges the two-dimensional definition of self-esteem used in this

study. Abundant literature supports a one-dimensional view of self-esteem focused on

worthiness. Rosenberg's (1965) iconic research on self-esteem as a feeling of value or

self-worth dominated the literature until the late 1990s. Self-esteem through this lens

focuses on attitudes or beliefs with an emphasis on feeling good. This view of self-esteem

seems sufficient in describing the connection of friendships and self-esteem in middle

adolescent girls. How these friendships connect to and influence a foundational element

of middle adolescent girls' self-esteem, their worthiness, is apparent in the study findings.

Growth and development through the dark side of friendships. Mean girls

have become an accepted part of American culture (Brown, 2003). Television, movies,

and magazines feature stories of cruel, competitive, yet surprisingly popular girls.

Fairytales often possess an evil sister or stepsister. Meanness and bullying receive more

attention in popular literature than the power or positivity of female relationships (Brown,

2003). This attention often results in an assumption that all middle adolescents will

encounter a mean girl or experience the dark side of friendship. The findings in this study support this assumption. Every girl in the study shared a story of an encounter with the dark side of friendships including the breakup of friend groups, abandonment by close friends, jealousy over boys or other girls, and encounters with the stereotypical mean girl.

The scarceness of scholarly literature on the dark side of friendships prior to the early 21st century is notable. Berndt's (2004) comprehensive review of this friendship literature found no explicit acknowledgments of the dark side. Berndt suggests that the dearth of research may relate to a desire by scholars to overemphasize the positive outcomes of healthy friendships. More research is needed on the dark side of friendships to understand its impact on the healthy development of middle adolescent girls. In the meantime, the abundance of popular literature and media supports a level of cultural acceptance in America of the negative impact of mean girls and the obstacles associated with the dark side of friendships (Brown, 2003).

The findings in this study suggest this interpretation is not necessarily always accurate. Participants' self-esteem largely benefited from their experiences with the dark side of friendship, a finding that is more aligned with recent literature (Berndt, 2004; Laursen & Pursell, 2009). Most of the participants in the study shared examples of emerging through the dark side of friendships with a greater sense of personal value. This increased self-worth motivated the girls to choose higher quality friends. They seek friends they trust implicitly without hesitation and with whom they can negotiate and quickly resolve conflict, should it arise.

Trustworthiness is built from a strong foundation of intimacy, similarity, and mutual responsiveness (Azmitia, 2001). It is this foundation that enables girls to easily

work through differences with friends (Azmitia, 2001). Most participants said that if an issue does arise with their friends, they are able to resolve the issue in days, if not hours. Conflict resolution strengthens individual self-confidence and also strengthens the relationship between the friends (Azmitia, 2001). Laursen and Pursell's (2009) research confirms Azmitia's findings and shows that within supportive relationships, like friendships, resolving conflict successfully leads girls to develop a stronger sense of independence.

The girls in the study reflect this strong sense of independence, self-confidence, and deep connections to their friends. Most spoke of their aspirations of college and exciting professional careers. They did not equivocate as to whether or not they would achieve these goals, they spoke without hesitation or doubt. The bonds with their friends nourished their spirits, which shone through their stories with energy and an underlying sense of invincibility.

Negotiating the dark side illuminates each dimension of self-esteem and their interrelationship. The link between what the girls did to emerge successfully from the other side and how they felt about themselves as a result was apparent (Mruk, 2006b). Many of the participants gained confidence from these experiences. They were more autonomous and made better decisions as a result, most notably around their choice in friends. At the same time, the participants' sense of worthiness, or understanding that success and happiness are deserved, motivated their choice. Their own choices then reinforced their worthiness in a self-fulfilling manner, illustrative of the interrelationship of self-esteem's two dimensions.

Mruk (2006a) discusses this interplay: Worthiness is earned through competent behavior, or in this case good choices, and these good choices, or competent behaviors propel an enhanced sense of self-worth in the participants. This interplay underscores the importance of the two-dimensional model of self-esteem in this study. Its expression shows how intricately linked friendships and self-esteem are in these findings.

The generally positive nature of the findings around the dark side of friendships did not appear in a small number of cases in this study. These participants disclosed stories that were more indicative of popular media and literature's interpretation of the impact of the dark side of friendship. They revealed a struggle to feel worthy and efficacious in the midst of being excluded, abandoned, or otherwise poorly treated by those they call friends (Brown, 2003). The self-esteem of the girls who are unable or who have not yet successfully navigated the dark side of friendship appeared negatively comprised. These girls seemed stuck, less competent than their self-assured counterparts to make decisions and move forward, and felt less worthy as a result (Benenson & Christakos, 2003).

Linking friendship characteristics to self-esteem. Friendships create a shared purpose for adolescent girls that enhance their confidence and sense of self (Berndt & Murphy, 2002; Bukowski et al., 2011; Hartup & Stevens, 1997). In the context of their girl-to-girl friendships, middle adolescent girls give and receive support. They learn that they can rely on others. They notice and foster the similarity of shared goals and aspirations within their relationships. Their friendships create a context for them to disclose what is important to them and receive validations that affirms their self-worth (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). The findings of this study contribute to the breadth of

scholarly research on the value of girl-to-girl friendships in middle adolescents. More importantly, they illuminate that friendships based on intimacy, similarity, and mutual responsiveness enable girls to build their competence and self-worth – their self-esteem -- through these friendships.

The emotional bond that links friends facilitates sharing and intimacy (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013). Participants talked frequently about the importance of being able to share all secrets with their friends, all the time. Intimacy has been shown to enhance trust, self-worth, and acceptance in friendships (Berndt, 2004). Self-disclosure fosters intimacy and intimacy fosters self-disclosure. Intimacy enhances self-respect and self-value in adolescent girls through reinforcing that they matter in the eyes of their friends (Gurogu et al., 2007). This study showed intimacy as foundational to the friendships described in the participants' narratives. These friendships demonstrably strengthened the confidence of the participants enabling them to achieve their goals and feel valued as individuals.

Girls in the study almost universally described their friends as similar to them. They talked about having similar personality, interests, and most often, a shared sense of humor. Most participants described laughing with friends with great joy. This finding contributes to the understanding that similarity brings and keeps friends together (Gurogu et al., 2007). The girls in the study seemed drawn to girls similar to them. In some cases, they were quite deliberate in choosing friends with similar interests and personalities, while in other cases their friends were synonymous with shared interests, like sports and dance. Similarity in nationality, race, or looks was not notable in this study. This may be due to homogeneous nature of the sample or it may be that it is not important to the girls who participated, it is hard to discern. Exploring this further may provide insight into

whether similarity in choosing friends for middle adolescent girls extends to race, nationality, and appearance, or if personality and social behavior are the predominant factors at play in the choice of friends for girls.

Bukowski et al.'s (2011) research found that adolescents select friends who are similar to them personally and socially. Personality and social behavior are important attributes in friends. When positive, these attributes contribute to sociability, peer popularity, academic achievement, and motivation to achieve (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013). The findings of this study are complementary with the positive attributes described by Bagwell and Schmidt's (2013) research. Affirmation from similar friends showed an increased feeling of worthiness among the study participants, while shared interests seemed to inspire them to succeed.

Approachability and engagement underlie the strong bond that defines friendship (Sullivan, 1953). Mutual responsiveness builds trusts in friendships and enables girls to feel worthy (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Girls in the study spoke about the importance of their friends having their back and always being there for them. They typically shared that this support is reciprocal, a point underscored in the friendship literature. The girls praise and encourage each other in sports, in school, and in life. Consistent with the literature, participants were enthusiastic when they spoke about how engaged they are with their friends. Engagement demonstrated through joy, laughter, and camaraderie appeared to largely reinforce the participants' competence and self-worth (Bukowski et al., 2011).

The impact of middle adolescent girls' competence domains on self-esteem.
Harter (2012) identifies patterns of competence and self-worth relevant to different

developmental stages. For middle adolescent girls, Harter found self-esteem defined

within the context of specific domains they relate to as important. These domains, several

of which appeared frequently in this study, are *scholastic competence, athletic*

competence, social acceptance, physical appearance, and *behavioral conduct.* Faircloth

and Hamm (2005) further reinforce these domains and connect them to friendships in

middle adolescent girls. "Friends are the key community for adolescents at school,

socially, and in sports, providing a sense of psychological belonging, increased feelings

of security, acceptance and value" (p. 76).

School, social, and sports as noted by Faircloth and Hamm (2005) and Harter

(2012) were the domains mentioned most frequently in the study findings. Participants

consistently shared stories of their friends in the context of one of these domains, echoing

an important part of the literature reviewed for this study. However, there was a distinct

difference from the literature in the domain of physical appearance and its importance to

middle adolescent girls. Harter (2012) and Azmitia (2001) discuss physical appearance as

one of the most important domains to middle adolescent girls, yet it barely surfaced in the

study. A small subset of participants mentioned that they liked to look nice or that

looking nice makes them feel good. Yet the constant self-evaluation typical to middle

adolescent girls described in the literature was not mentioned, even when girls were

asked to share what makes them feel best about themselves or discuss what makes them

not feel good about themselves.

This lack of reference to appearance coincides with little reference by participants

to the role social media plays in their lives. While there were no specific questions

referencing social media, the literature suggests social media plays a dominant role in the

daily existence of middle adolescent girls as evidenced by the popularity of Instagram and Snapchat to this demographic (King, 2016). Is it possible that the continual photo posting, the explosion of "selfies," and the constant presence of social media has made this generation of girls less sensitive to appearance as an important domain? Exploring a connection between the absence of appearance as important and the constant presence of social media for these participants could be interesting future research.

Study findings were dominated by stories of scholastic, athletic, and social competence, and the high value the participants place on success in these domains. The relationship of the domains to friendships was clear; friendships seemed to thrive in the communities that support each domain. Self-esteem was strengthened for the participants as success in these domains fostered their competence, while sharing the success with their friends validated their self-worth.

Limitations

The study participants are demographically similar. Most are White and nearly all are from suburban towns in Massachusetts. The majority are in high school and live in two-parent homes. This similarity enabled the research to understand and describe this particular population with some depth. This understanding may not be applicable to a different group of participants.

The girls in the study did not present, with one exception, issues commonly identified as risk factors to healthy development. Typically, factors that put adolescent girls at risk are individual, family, or community influences that impact their chances to succeed in school, achieve financial independence, or preserve their personal safety (Moore, 2006). Examples of risk factors include mental illness, poverty, or violence at

home. Given the narrative nature of this study, it is possible that the participants chose

not to share details that would indicate risk factors. The study findings suggest the

participants are developmentally healthy as indicated through their achievements in

school, sports, and socially, yet this cannot be certain.

The study was limited to girls who volunteered to participate with the

understanding that the research was about their girl-to-girl friendships. A genuine interest

in talking about their friendships is assumed. The data were self-reported, what they shared

about their friendships could not be independently verified. It was taken at face value and

assumed to be true. It is important to consider the limitations of self-reported data when

drawing conclusions.

Locating the study largely in suburban Massachusetts towns may have influenced

the fact that the majority of participants aspire to college. Massachusetts is one of the

most educated states in the United States with 89.7% of adults having a high school

diploma and 41.2% holding bachelor's degrees (Frohlich, Sauter, Corman, & Stebbins,

2015). Massachusetts is the seventh highest state investing in education in the United

States, spending $14,500 per pupil in 2013 (Harwin, Lloyd, Corman, & Yettuck, 2015).

Another possible influence of education in the lives of these participants is the

lack of findings suggesting physical appearance is important to these girls. Scholarly and

popular literature indicates that middle adolescent girls place great value in their

appearance as a source of their self-esteem. The findings in this study are inconsistent

with the literature. Perhaps due to the setting of the study, these girls are getting strong

messages reinforcing that even if physical appearance is important to how they feel about

themselves, they should not share these feelings. The proliferation of organizations like,

Girls Inc., Girl Up, and *The Girl Effect,* have grown in popularity in the last decade with

messages of inspiration and empowerment. It is also possible that these messages are counter balancing the broader societal and cultural messages related to the importance of middle adolescent girls' appearance.

In narrative studies, the role of the researcher is important to recognize. The researcher is the instrumentation in a narrative interview (Josselson, 2013). The researcher has several characteristics in common with the participants in the study, she is Caucasian, she lives in a suburban town in Massachusetts, and she aspires to high levels of achievement academically and professionally. It is possible that the girls may have been trying to impress the researcher as they discussed their educational aspirations. They were aware that this study is part of a doctoral degree program. Maintaining an objective presence throughout the interview was used to minimize any researcher bias in the data collection.

Recommendations for future research

Participant sample. Future research should consider a demographically diverse population or one that is developmentally at risk. The homogeneous nature of the participant sample in this study provided insight into how these particular girls construct a relationship between their friendships and their self-esteem. These insights cannot be generalized to other populations. Conducting the study in different geographic regions, under mixed socio-economic circumstances, or with a more varied racial and ethnic composition could expand the value of these study findings.

The findings of this study indicate the participants are highly motivated to succeed in college and beyond. Many participants shared impressive aspirations. Most were highly confident that they would achieve these goals. A longitudinal study would be

interesting to understand if these findings remain consistent over time. Will the majority of the participants successfully complete college, develop into healthy adults, and maintain their positive self-esteem and friendships?

Appearance. A cursory online search of *"teen girls' empowerment organizations"* highlighted dozens of organizations around the world committed to making a difference in the lives of teenage girls. These organizations aim to empower girls to become social activists. They promote teen feminism. They encourage girls to defy stereotypes related to women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). They encourage girls to accept and love themselves. These organizations do meaningful work. Future research into their success in minimizing the importance of appearance as a driver of middle adolescent girls' self-esteem would be very useful.

How demographics influenced the study findings related to physical appearance as an important driver of participants' self-esteem may also be worthy of future research. Understanding how factors like education, socio-economic status, race, and geography influence the role of appearance in middle adolescent girls' self-esteem seems relevant to investigate. This could be accomplished through understanding the importance of appearance to a more diverse participant population than the one used for this study.

Role of social media. Another avenue for further study is the influence of social media on middle adolescent girl friendships. Over the past decade, technology has become increasingly important in the lives of adolescents. They are constantly texting, social networking, and photo/video sharing. Adolescents use their cell phones to keep in touch with friends, make plans with friends, and even to make new friends

(Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). The participants in the study are digital natives, they were born and raised with online communication and computers (Prensky, 2001).

All of the participants in the study have access to technology. The interviews were confirmed via text or email. Yet the role technology plays in the participants' friendships barely surfaced. Understanding if the ubiquitous use of phones supports girls' friendships seems important to explore in future research. Technology facilitates continual contact with friends. It makes it possible to be there for each other any time of day or night regardless of location. The ability for late night conversations via text may deepen girls' friendships enabling sharing of secrets and advice around the clock.

The specific role of photo and video technology may also prove interesting. The use of Instagram and Snapchat by middle adolescent girls is prolific (King, 2016). They are constantly sharing pictures and videos of themselves. It would be interesting to understand if this willingness to routinely expose their photos has made middle adolescent girls less concerned with their appearance as a driver of self-esteem.

Other recommendations

Proactively supporting and encouraging positive girl-to-girl friendships is noticeably absent from school curriculums. In spite of the importance of friendships in the healthy development of middle adolescent girls, most schools do not provide any formal training on friendships. A required course in early adolescence on what makes a good friend, how to successfully navigate conflict in friendships, and the value of having a supportive friend or group of friends could support self-esteem.

Conclusions

Girl-to-girl friendships play an essential role in the self-esteem of middle adolescent girls. These friendships help girls build and strengthen their feelings of competence and self-worth. This study makes explicit the assumed connection between friendships and self-esteem embedded in the literature. The affirmation, support, and acceptance of friends strengthen self-confidence and self-worth in middle adolescent girls. Increased self-confidence and self-worth facilitates girls' academic, athletic, and social success.

The interconnected circles in Figure 1 show how middle adolescent girls dynamically construct their self-esteem through their friendships. The opinion of others impacts girls' self-worth but not their competence. Their feelings or attitudes may be diminished by what their friends think of them, yet their competence remains largely unscathed. Study participants demonstrated a strong drive to achieve with successful results regardless of any deterioration in their self-worth that resulted due to the opinion of others.
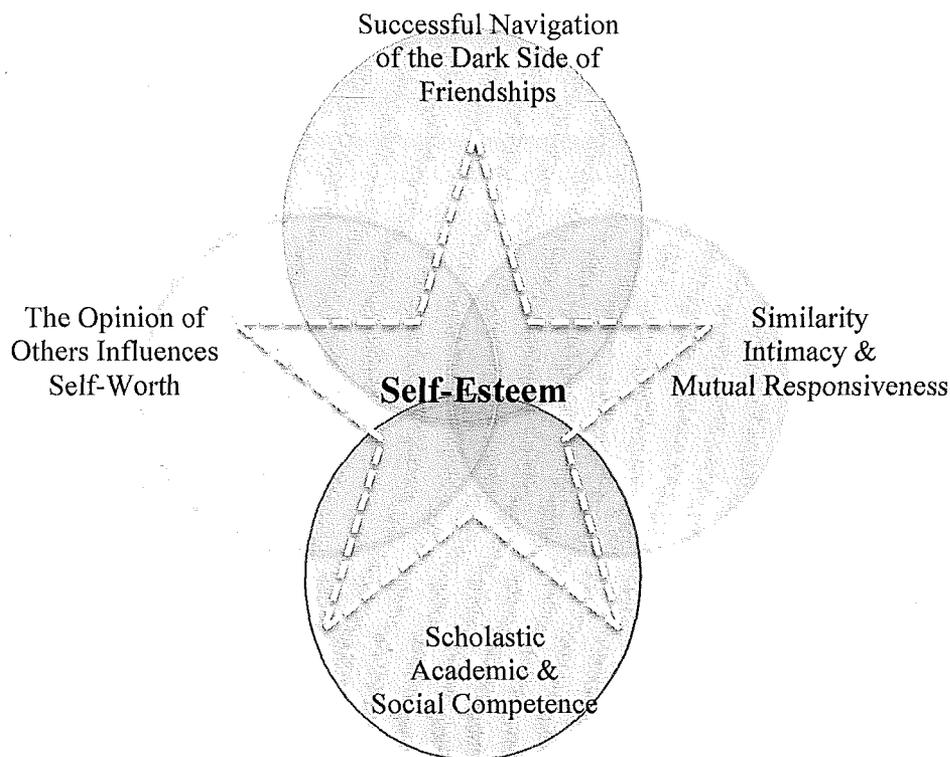
Figure 1. **Friendships and Middle Adolescent Girl's Self-Esteem**

As the girls in the study navigated the dark side of girl-to-girl friendships, both dimensions of self-esteem became clearly visible. Positive development resulted when girls persevered through the dark side of friendship. Girls were stronger, more confident, and more capable or competent selecting higher quality friends. Higher quality friends in turn enhanced the girls' self-worth. This interrelationship reinforced the observable connection of the participants' girl-to-girl friendships to both their competence and their self-worth – *their self-esteem.*

The next circle reinforces that what the girls do and how they do it matters. Their friends affirm their aspiration, achievements, and their importance. The qualities of friendships – similarity, intimacy, and mutual responsiveness – are foundational to how

girls construct their self-esteem through their friendships. The final circle strengthens this finding as it reinforces how girl-to-girl friendships influence academic, athletic, and social success, which in turn influences middle-adolescent girls' self-esteem.

While the findings in this study are clear, there is still much to learn. Expanding this research and exploring the variation among different populations will likely produce diverse results. Investigation of the questions that emerged in this study around the dark side of friendships, the role of appearance in middle adolescent girls, and the effect of social media in the life of girls will contribute to broader conversations and knowledge creation. Answers to these questions have tremendous potential to enable greater understanding of the importance of friendships to the self-esteem of middle adolescent girls.

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APPENDIX A
Interview Questions for Main Study

The icebreaker questions are:

Where do you go to high school?

What year are you in?

Where did you grow up?

Tell me about your family.

What do you like to do outside of school?

My opening prompt transitioning into the interview is: *Tell me about your friends.*

Follow on questions include:

What are your friends like?

What do you like about them?

What do they like about you?

Tell me about the best things that happen with you and your friends?

What kind of problems do you deal with in regards to your friends?

To draw out more specific connections to global and relational self-esteem, I will ask:

Tell me when you feel best about yourself.

When do you not feel good about yourself?

How do what others (friends, peers, family, authority figures) think of you impact

how you feel about yourself?

How would others (peers, family, authority figures) describe you? How would

they describe your friends?

What makes you happy?

Tell me about your hopes, dreams, and plans for the future.

APPENDIX B
Recruitment Poster

FIELDING
Graduate University
The best graduate school for adult learners.

Participants Needed For Study on Friendships and Self-Esteem in Middle Adolescent Girls

I am looking for girls between the ages of 14 – 17 to talk about their friendships.

You are invited to participate in a 45-minute confidential interview to discuss your female friendships and their importance to you. Participation in this interview is strictly voluntary. Anything you share in the interview will be kept confidential. I will explain the details of how I will do this in our first meeting. Parental permission is required in order for you to participate.

Please contact me via text or phone at 617-697-7267 or email me at susanannmiele@gmail.com

APPENDIX C

Fielding Graduate University

Assent Form for Adolescents Ages 13-17 and Parental Permission

Study Name: Understanding the Relationship of Girl-to-Girl Friendships and Self-esteem in Middle Adolescent Girls

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Susan A. Miele, a doctoral student in the School of Human and Organizational Development at Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA. This study is supervised by Dr. Dorothy Agger-Gupta. This research is part of my Fielding dissertation.

Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the information provided in this form.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship of girl-to-girl friendships and self-esteem in middle-adolescent girls (ages 14 – 17).

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

15 -20

What Is Involved In The Study?

Participants will take part in a confidential one-on-one interview.

How Long Will I Be In The Study?

The interview will take 30 - 60 minutes, which is the totality of the time required for participation in the study.

What Are The Risks Of The Study?

Discussing friendships and self-esteem might lead participants to disclose information they consider sensitive or personal. There is a risk that this may make a girl uncomfortable in the interview or part of the interview. If this is the case, I will remind her that the information she is sharing will be kept confidential. She does not have to answer any questions that make her uncomfortable. Should she still not feel comfortable with these additional reminders, I will stop the interview and thank her for her participation.

What Are The Benefits To Taking Part In This Study?

The benefit of this study is to add to scholarly conversation and knowledge involving friendships and self-esteems by understanding the way that middle adolescent girls construct a relationship between the two. Both friendships and self-esteem have been shown to impact the development of adolescent girls yet little research exists connecting them. This study will contribute valuable knowledge to the scholarly community by linking these two important subjects in the context of the lives of middle-adolescent girls.

Statement of Confidentiality

Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at 30 Mill Street, Arlington MA in a locked file. The tape recordings will be listened to by me, perhaps my supervising faculty, and a confidential Transcriber. The transcripts and any corresponding records will be shredded five years after the study is complete and the recordings will be electronically erased at the same time.

Pseudonyms will be used to identify participants, no participant names will be used nor will the name or location of the high school be identified.

You will be asked to provide a different name for any quotes that might be included in the final research report. If any direct quotes will be used, permission will be sought from you first.

The results of this research will be published in my dissertation and possibly published in subsequent journals, books or presentations.

Your consent to participate in this study gives permission to access your data to the researcher, supervising faculty, and possibly a confidential Research Assistant as well as authorized representatives of the Fielding Graduate University Institutional Review Board.

Participation In Research Is Voluntary:

You decision to participate in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will not have any negative consequences. Should you stop participating, your data will be eliminated from the study and will be destroyed.

Study Results:

You may request a copy of the summary of the results by indicating your interest at the end of this form.

Additional Information:

If you have any questions about participating in this study, please tell the Researcher or contact the supervising faculty before signing this form. If at any time you have questions

or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Fielding Graduate University IRB by email at irb@fielding.edu or by telephone at 805-898-4033 or 800-340-1099, extension 4033.

You may also ask questions at any time during your participation in this study.

Two copies of this informed consent form have been provided. Please sign both, indicating you have read, understood, and agree to participate in this research. Return one to the researcher and keep the other for your files. The Institutional Review Board of Fielding Graduate University retains the right to access to all signed informed consent forms and study documents.

I have read the above informed consent document and have had the opportunity to ask questions about this study. I have been told my rights as a research participant. The procedures, risks, and benefits of this study have been explained to me. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____

Participant signature   Date

_____

Printed name of participant

Parental Permission to participate in research: I have read and understood the information provided in this document. I give permission for my child
_____ (name of child) to participate in the research study described above.

_____   _____

Parent/Guardian signature   Date

_____   _____

Parent/Guardian signature   Date

Dorothy Agger-Gupta,   Susan A. Miele,
Fielding Graduate University   30 Mill Street
2112 Santa Barbara Street   Apartment 128
Santa Barbara, CA 93105   Arlington, MA
805-687-1099   617-697-7267

APPENDIX D
Parental Permission Letter

April 15, 2016

Dear Parent:

I am a doctoral student in the School of Human and Organization Development at Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, California. I would like to include your child, along with her classmates, in a research study about friendships and self-esteem. Dorothy Agger-Gupta, my faculty supervisor and chair of my Dissertation Committee, will supervise this study. This study is part of my Fielding dissertation.

If you give permission for your child to participate in this study, she will participate in a confidential 30 -60-minute individual interview with me. I will ask her to talk about her experience with female friendships and their relationship to how she feels about herself.

I will explain this research activity to your child so that she understands. Your child may only participate if she agrees to do so. The information your child provides will be kept strictly confidential and will not become a part of your child's school record. Your permission allows my supervising faculty and me to see your child's data. Your child's data may also be inspected by representatives of the Fielding Graduate University Institutional Review Board.

The results of this research study will be published in my dissertation and possibly published in subsequent journals, books, or presentations. After the study is finished, a summary of the results will be made available to interested parents.

Your child is free to decline to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time, either during or after participation. Should your child withdraw, her data will be removed from the study and destroyed.

If you have any questions about the study, please tell my supervising faculty or me before signing this form. If at any time you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, contact the Fielding Graduate University IRB by email at irb@fielding.edu or by telephone at 805-898-4033.

Please discuss this study with your child and check the appropriate line below. Two copies of this permission letter have been provided. Please sign and date the bottom of this form. Return one copy to the researcher and keep the other copy for your files.

Sincerely,

Susan A. Miele
30 Mill Street
Apartment 128
Arlington, MA 02476

617-697-7267

Dorothy Agger-Gupta
Fielding Graduate University
2020 De La Vina Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93105

805-687-1099 / 800-340-1099

■ ■

I have read and understood the information provided and do/do not (circle one) give
permission for my child _____ (name of child) to
participate in the research project described above.

_____

PARENT'S NAME (please print)

_____

PARENT'S SIGNATURE

_____

Date

APPENDIX E
Relational Interview Map

Instructions

Think about you and your girlfriends. Draw a circle near the center of the page that

represents you. Now draw circles around your circle that represent your girlfriends. Place

the circles for your friends in relationship to the circle that represents you based on how

close your relationship is with that friend i.e. best friends will be the closest circle to

yours, team or class mates would be further away, etc.

APPENDIX F
IRB Approval

FIELDING
Graduate University

FGU Institutional Review Board | (805) 898-4034 | IRB@Fielding.edu

FIELDING
Graduate University

April 15, 2016

Susan Miele
Cc: Dorothy Agger-Gupta, Patrice Rosenthal

RE: IRB No. 15-1110 (Pilot/Dissertation) "Understanding the relationship of girl-to-girl friendships and self-esteem in middle adolescent girls." by Susan Miele.

Dear Susan,

On behalf of the Fielding Institutional Review Board, this letter is to confirm that the formal Revision Request received on 4/11/2016 has been **APPROVED** for the study listed below.

STUDY ID:	15-1110 MIELE Susan (HOD Nov 2015)
REVISION TYPE:	Fast Track (submitted 4/11/2016)
DETERMINATION:	APPROVED (4/15/2016)
STUDY EXPIRATION:	4/15/2017

This study is subject to continuing review by 4/15/2017 unless closed before this date.

Any additional changes or modifications to your approved study must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval. Some changes may be approved by expedited review; others may require full board review. **Revision Request Instructions** can be downloaded from the IRB website.

Please contact Irb@fielding.edu if you have any questions or require further information.

Best wishes,

Annabelle Nelson, PhD
Institutional Review Board Chair
Fielding Graduate University

APPENDIX G
Pilot Interview Guide

1. My opening prompt is: *Tell me about your friends.*

2. Follow on questions include:

   What are your friends like?

   What do you like about them?

   What do they like about you?

   Tell me about the best things that happen with you and your friends?

   What kind of problems do you deal with in regards to your friends?

3. If I need to learn more about the girls than they have shared, I will ask:

   What do you like most about yourself?

   When are you happiest?

   What are your hopes, dreams, and plans for the future?

APPENDIX H
Thematic Matrix

ADOLESCENT GIRL FRIENDSHIPS AND SELF-ESTEEM

Participant	Friend Group	Best friends	Dark Side	Importance of Friends	Aspirations	Competence/ Worth	Relational self esteem	Domains of competence	Notes/other
1 Meryl "We are just going to be really good friends and be a group, you know?" "We are just super close, we are into other, you know?"	Her close friend group is 3 immediate friends (4 including her) and then another group of 3 they socialize with. Her close friend group is both similar (similarity) and different from her, but they share the same	She has two best friends separate and apart from her friend group of three (that also has another friend group of three). She look up to her best friends for the qualities they have that she doesn't have – one is	She experienced some of the shadow side of friendship when she was new to her high school in 10th grade and girls were "not exactly welcoming". With her friends, conflict/s hadow side is	The importance of friends to this participant is being able to just hang out with the friends, share a group text, and talk about all their problems and issues (intimacy). Riding around and singing is some of the most fun she has just being with her friend group.	College came through as important but not as much as her desire to work with kids. She was less definitive or maybe less passionate about her life in the future than the girls in the pilot.	She feels good about herself when she is around her family, friends and people she likes. She can be her "weird self" in these environments and not be judged but be accepted and this feels good to her, she feels valued. Grades influence how she feels about herself, if she does well, she is in a good mood, if not, not.	What other people think about her "affects her a lot" She wants to 'please people' or she feels bad about herself. If someone doesn't like her, she worries about it	School, social acceptance, and behavior were the most notable competence areas important to this participant. Doing well in school matters. Shared values with her friends matter (she noted one no longer friend who just "didn't grow up the	Lots of "I think" and hesitancy which did not show up when she talked about her family. Her family is important to her visibly as in more than the girls in the pilot, she mention

values. They also accept each other for who they are (reciproc ity). She looks up to her friend group for qualities she doesn't possess. Her group is "mature" and they all trust and support each other. They don't do "the stupid	very smart and the other is an amazing dancer (somethin g that is very important to this participan t).	minor "we can get on each others' nerves but it doesn't really matter", they deal with it quite quickly or more so it just doesn't really become an issue. She describes an understa nding that sometim es someone makes you mad		*I always struggled a bit with grades* *I know I am smart, but.*	same way") And being accepted for being her is very important given she felt this wasn't the case when she first came to this school, new – this acceptance drew her to this group of friends she now is very close with.	ed them and they played a role in her story.

				How others think about her	The three domains	This participant	This girl
2 Caitlin *"I have best friends that I play sports with and they are my sports best friends. I also have school best friends and then I have yet this*	middle school stuff", they just have a nice and positive clique.	Her close friend group is 3, however this is a lot of strife within this group. This participant considers herself part of many groups (see quote) yet this	She described on of her friends as her best friend, but friend groups dominated the conversation. There was not much to note on the best friend.	one day and you move on, it is not an issue, it just "happens".	Much drama exists for this friend group - there is competition and secrets. Both of which lead to a lack of trust. *"Someone is always fighting with*	She is very loyal to her friends and they are connected to who she is and what she does see quote on her friends. The disruption in the group is hard because it complicates everything. When things are good, the group is always out together on the weekends,	She is clear and focused on one thing she wants to do career wise (and needs college for it but this nor any other future aspirations were much of a big deal to her as much as her desire to help kids with cancer as a career) and it very much makes	How others think about her has a big impact on her. She wants *teachers, parents, and coaches to think of her as good* and when they don't, it stresses her out. She also wants to be a role model for	The three domains mentioned in that column are most prevalent in this interview however how her Mom views the role she played in nurturing the friend group and a sick friend came up as important to her. She values her ability to do this …**take care of others**	This participant clearly identified 3 domains as important to her – sports, school and social life/friends (in this order). *"During sports, if we are having a good game, I feel really good." "In school if I do well on something, I feel good*	This girl is a "feeler" and very sensitive to the issues plaguing her friend group *I feel I feel I feel* Is how her voice plays out through out. She

my real best friends." "I really want to be the person to help make the lives of the kids who have cancer 10x's better."	group is the one she most identifies with. Part of what seems missing here is while these friends are similar (they are caring), they seem to not be mutually responsive (secretive) nor can they trust each other, impacting their	*someone or someone is always upset."* They go through waves of being close, yet they haven't yet broken up. She feels one girl in particular is the source of the angst. This girl joined the friend group this year and "it just got	walking around school, having coffee, group texting and supporting each other. This comes and goes and when it is off, there is a void for her.	her feel good and positive about herself. See quote on helping kids.	and it is reinforced by her Mom which makes her feel good.	kids that she helps, babysits and coaches. It is deeply important to her that she has a good reputation and that she doesn't *mess up.*	*and the same with friends, if we are having a good week, then feel good about myself."* Because this areas matter to her so much, she conversely doesn't feel good about herself when these things are not going well in these areas.	even describes herself as *" I am like the mom of the group, I take care of them."* Other groups often exclude her group due to one of the members, yet *"we don't want to be that group that leaves*

intimacy.	"ruined" due to her competiveness and behavior aimed at trying to break up the group by getting close to one of the other group members at the exclusion of others.					*her out."* So they try to find ways around it yet this doesn't often work, more strife arises.	One of the most poised and confident girls, articulate e and self
3 Whitney *"I am actually more confident about who I*	This girl intentionally does not have a friend group. She *"hasn't had luck*	The break up of one friend group in middle school and one in	Definitely important, but also emphasized the importance of her Dad, brother, extended	She sees herself clearly in a big city, doing meaningful work that will make a difference in	She clearly has a good sense of self – see quotes. Yet, she does get hung up in comparing herself to others, which	Hard to distinguish clearly here -- very self-confident and sees herself as viewed	Sports, music, friends make her feel good about herself and are closely connected to self

with friend groups in the past"	unique shared interests – one is her musical friend, one her sports friend, and one her "crazy" friend. Each of these friends is similar in different ways, which is why she has chosen them. They all have her back and are there for her.	sophomore year has caused her to not want a friend group. And while these were impactful *"she was busy being pissed off and mad"* on how she thought about friend groups, in general she is "over holding grudges and	family and neighbors that are like family. She enjoys having fun with her friends and emphasized that she is not a typical high school girl, and likes that these girls accept that and are her friends because she is uniquely her. Similarly she likes the same about them.	the world. She *"hopes to live up to what my mom, but I don't want to be like my mom, I want to be own person but I want to embody the good qualities of her."*	makes her feel bad about herself when she does it. Can be a physical comparison or scholastic achievement or just in general. She doesn't want to feel in competition with other girls and sometimes she feels this is imposed on her and can leave her feeling bad.	very positively by others and that contributes to her feeling more self confident in who she is and the choices she has made. Which came first her confidence or the positive view?	her friends. . School performance didn't come up.	assured. Did losing her mother at 12 after a long illness make a difference?
am than a lot of people because of the things I have been through and who I have chosen to be." *"I think a lot of people view me in a pretty positive way, which probably contributes to my confidence."*								

They reciprocate in doing the things they like to do together – musical stuff, sports, eating, singing, or just being weird which for this girl is also "being herself". She tells them everything *(intimacy)* and in return they do the same – she is a *"good*	keeping bridges burned" and has chosen to be friendly with everyone including the former friends. So..shadow side with a positive outcome? She doesn't like when one of her friends is insecure and not direct, but she

		listener."	addresses this head on and resolves it quickly.						
4 Jackie "I feel like I have friends anymore because I don't know who to trust."	This girl is in the middle of 8th grade, last year of middle school. She seems desperate to have a friend group	She has two close friends after the break up of the group but that is not enough for her, she wants to be part of a group. The more the merrier is her attitude and this seems important for social acceptanc	A lot at play here around boys breaking up the group (coming into friendshi ps) jealously, competiti on, and a need for two of the girls to get attention from the boys.	So important to her – it is "torture going to school because I don't even know who to sit with at lunch." Also see quote. Trust is very important to her as the basis for her friendships.	Wants to go to college and be a pediatrician but this did not play much of a role in the conversation.	Conflicting here – strong sense of herself (self efficacy?) in that she was willing throughout the break up to stand up for herself, try to stay neutral and tell the truth about what she saw as right and wrong in the situation. "And I told them the truth and they don't like hearing the truth, that is part of the	Interesting here, she was strong and very independen t and "Most people I don't really care what they think about me like that's there opinion, it doesn't really matter." Yet, she is very troubled by the break up of this friend	There wasn't a lot I could glean here. She likes to dance and feels best about herself when she is dancing because she is doing something she likes with other people who like it. Her dance friends are just that though she doesn't consider	This girl was the youngest, I spoke with, 14. Not sure yet if that is significa nt but it seems to be. Also, she lost her father a couple of years ago so has been through a lot.

	rather than just a few friends. Though the two that she has kept close with she feels like are there for her (intimacy) and understand what she is going through, like to do the same things as her (similar).	e of at least her social life. The two friends that make				*problem.*" Yet clearly the fact that she is so distraught over this, it is very important to how she values herself…so she is a bit of a conundrum.	group.	them strongly as friends.	
5 Kiley	She has two best friends		Several comment s on how	Very, but balanced out by family	Very clear that she wants to go	She has a very strong sense of efficacy	Peer feedback bothers her	Strong positive voice	Oldest of 5 girls,

"What others think about me impacts me a lot, when someone says somethin g bad about me, like it lowers my self-esteem." I know that this shouldn' t happen, but it does."	and the three of them make a very close group. They are very trustwort hy, they tell each other everythin g, and they help each other out with what ever they might be going through without any judgment. (Similarit y, reciprocit	up her friend group are her best friends, they are sort of interchang eable as a group/best friends.	her friends are different from other friend groups at high school – they don't talk about each behind their backs like other girls or get mad for three days and make up. Her friends are very loyal so would not behave	being very important – lots of cousins and she values those relationships a lot as well as her friends.	to a good college, be an English teacher (she loves to read) and have a family and a "good life overall" Pretty matter of fact about this actually in a self assured way that says – I work hard and will make this happen.	(internal motivation) and values it about her friends – "If I thought I was going to do horrible I will study for like 3 hours." "I like to succeed in school. I study all the time." *I am hardworking* *I am intelligent* *I work really hard* *I take criticism and I fix it* She describes her friends	a lot – not her friends nor family – but classmates and others at high school. See quote. *"I could get a thousand complemen ts and one bad thing sticks and the complemen ts don't matter anymore."*	around her passion for and success in school, and how hard she works to do so. *I like to do good* *I like to succeed* *I feel really good* *I succeeded* Similar about sports but not nearly as deeply passionately .	recogniz es the importan ce of being a role model to her younger sisters.

y, and intimacy very strong for this participant). Other similarities – nice, funny, hardworking in things that matter. Doesn't care what they do together, they have fun just hanging out. But they like to shop and eat	in what she describes as a more typical way for girls in high school. She did also mention a friend from her extended group that is being "stereotypical" in that she is drinking and stuff	similarly, but not as it relates to school, but if they want something (trip to Italy), they will work hard to get it.

		out a lot.								Not super talkative in that she didn't elaborate but she did answer/address the key questions.
6 Meredith		She has three close friends and they like to do stuff Trustworthiness Easy to talk to Always willing to hang out Like going places and doing	Not one best friend, nor did she describe these girls as all best friends – just the "closer ones".	She observes that other people have different problems with their friends, but *she likes to stay out of the drama.* She also noted that though she drew friends further away from her on the map, those friends	Not particularly passionate reply here – she responded that her family and going out with "people" makes her happy but didn't elaborate or reinforce that friends really matter to her happiness or her dreams or future success	No passion here – unsure and hesitant about college but loves swimming and would like to do this if college is in her future	She compares herself to others a lot and feels bad particularly in school where she doesn't feel like she measures up as she is in "lower classes" than her friends.	She takes what others say about her "very personally" and is hurt if she hears that anyone is talking bad about her.	She feels good when she gets compliments about her athletic performance, she values being a good athlete and it makes her feel good when people reinforce that with compliments. School is an issue, friends are important but she was not the most enthusiastic of girls I have	

	adventures together	you can only *"talk with about certain things and the trusting thing with them is not as much."*					interviewed.	Behavior mattered to her however – respectful, responsible and smart decisions are important to her – for her and her friends
7 Kesley	Not interested in a friend group. She and her best friend seem to bond around the fact that they	Two best friends and that is it, others are acquaintances that she drew on map. And interestingly in spite of the instructions one of	Had a lot of friend drama in middle school which turned her off to friend groups she *"doesn't really surround herself"*	Her family seems much more important – she describe them as really close and like to do everything together as a family. Though she doesn't intensely care about this one	Wants to be an athletic trainer, there is a great role model at her school but unlike other girls her age she isn't really thinking about college and how she will achieve this	Very confident girl (too much so?) Describes herself as really strong, no reservations, doesn't hold back. *"I am really straight forward and believe as a best friend*	Mature in how she things about what matters in friends – *"growing with somebody you trust and as people."* *"Being able to have deep*	See comments in notes column. School is hard for her but she engages in it and participates actively. Not a lot of connections	Very different from the girls I have intervie wed so far -- in that social acceptan ce (nor any of the other domains

don't have a lot of other friends? *Hmmm... need to look at literature on this*	her best friends is her sister that is 2 years older than her so really one best friend in high school was mostly what she talked about. And she said *"It is going to be okay because if we have each other everything else is going to be fine."* Time with her friends is relaxing,	*with girls a lot, it is over whelming." The* source of the drama was disloyal friends (or friends that didn't have her back) and not being able to deal with that. Resolves problems (which if any are communi cation related)	friend – *"mothering her",* *"checking on her", and* *"spending a lot of time together"*	goal.	*you should be straight forward – because like if no else is going to tell you the truth, your best friend should."*	here.	*conversati ons with no awkwardne ss"* She sees herself as a mediator and spokespers on. Seems important to note that she feels self confident mainly because of her family support and messaging around her being beautiful and not needing to worry as	importan t to this age group) doesn't seem to be the least bit importan t to her – or if it is she has a very good façade.

							she always has them. **And this has helped her in not worrying about what others think of her like she did in middle school.**	Appearance dominated as the domain of importance for this girl – which was the first time it really showed up strongly in the interviews to date.	This participant seemed to lack self-esteem in physical appearance more than any of the girls interviewed so
		going to mall, but just hanging out is fine and that is enough fun.	easily with her best friend. They understand each other.			She feels good when others are paying her compliments about her looks or being smart. She is very self critical, doesn't think she is smart, thinks she is fat, and generally was down on			
				Hard to say, she enjoys the two friends but doesn't seem to be connect their importance to her in any of the stories she told. The dysfunctional friend seemed to play almost a bigger role in importance as she was	Moving somewhere warm was about it.				
8 Annie	Her friend group is her and two very close friends. They are very similar, like the same things, are thought of "as	Her best friends and friend group are one in the same. *"They make her very happy, they are fun to be around and are*	She is besieged by some friend drama right now from what used to be the fourth member of the friend group.						

atypical eighth graders", they like alternative music, comics, arts, and movies (which most of the girls interviewed would not describe as their interests.) "For real, I trust them, if there were a problem, they will be there for me."	hilarious."	This friend "started a lot of crap this year." The girl made bad decisions – cutting herself and doing weed and now has been talking badly about the participant, name calling and then denying it. This is very stressful for the participant	genuinely stressed out about how nasty this girl had been to her and how that was causing her so much worry.	
			herself. No particular connections to friends when she is happy – when a new episode of a show comes on, when she is listening to music, or going on a health walk in the neighborhood.	Peers seem to matter the most. She discounted her family feedback as important to her.
				far. Note she was in middle school – age 14.

9 Bella *"I like being friends with everyone, it is nice."* *"I try to match positive energy with*	Part of an intensely connecte d (daily on social media) friend group from camp where she has been going since she was 8 and	Has many friends but didn't describe or focus on any one as a best friend.	Very important, no one else really played an important role in her story even though she mentioned that she is super close to her mom and her cousins. Her camp friends really bring her "to life." She	Clear aspirations to be a sports broadcaster and has been accepted to a 3 plus one program to get a Masters degree in 4 years. Yet, helping people came up again and again. I can't	Has clear sense of self-efficacy and self-worth and demonstrated this throughout the conversation – yet I am struggling with specifics maybe because of the overwhelming relational self-esteem that she exhibits.	*"You can't help but love yourself more because some people are so confident, it rubs off on you."* She is deeply impacted by her friends in	Behavioral –she is a social, well-spoken girl, she gave many examples of helping others. She values learning from others and likes to surround herself with similar people.	Complex girl – **all about relation ships** – compete nce/wort h/domai ns were woven througho ut the conversa tion but without as much specifics
because she wants to get along but can't trust this girl and trust is key to her other friendshi ps.	*"I feel bad that I can't stand up to her."* A couple of very specific examples of the shadow side of friendshi p played major roles in this							

positive energy and go with that."

became a counselor a couple of years ago. 12 girls that keep in touch daily. Strong sense of intimacy with this group, they share everything and are there for each other always – mutual responsiveness.

In contrast, not a part of a

story. One is about a mean girl and other about how a boy came between two of her friends causing them to no longer be a small group.

The mean girl is "a friend" who is nasty, intimidating, and jealous,

lights up and is incredibly energetic when she talks about them. Which she did a good amount of the time we talked. She described camp as "her happy place" and she plans to continue with it through college.

help but wonder if she will end up doing something different after college.

Strong, convicted, and successful. Job, college, friends, boyfriend. Full of life and radiated energy.

particular and in an interestingly contrasting way – She is confident, happy, and energized by her camp friends and feels week, bad, and drained by several of her high school friends most notably one mean girl that she knows she should not be friends with but feels bad about

Social acceptance sort of – need to look at how this is described in the literature – she describes herself several times as being very social and gave examples.

She clearly is competent in both school based on her recent college acceptance and in tennis (team captain) but

as other interviews.

Very close with her mom, who is a single mom, but her mom didn't come up at all

			they did
		ending the relationshi p even though the relationshi p makes her feel bad. A bit complicate d.	
yet the participa nt feels bad and doesn't to end their friendshi p.			
friend group intention ally (*she tries to disperse herself as much as possible and doesn't believe in one friend group*) in high school because she wants to be friends with everyone . Her map had little circles all over it with a			

group of them together for her camp friends. She describes herself as very sociable and that humor is key in her friendshi ps. She likes doing different things with different people (always ice cream with one friend, always						

10 Kirsten *"I feel really, really good about myself when I do good on my grades."*	(Chinese food with another) She likes to think of herself as friends with everyone but clearly what is most important is her four best friends.	She has four best friends. There used to be a small group of them but two of them got in a fight so now she is friends with both of them separately. She described herself and her friends nearly identically	A boy caused the two friends to fight and not be friends anymore. She doesn't like conflict with her friends and works quickly to smooth things over that come up. A recent issue around	Very important, they are what makes her happy and where she wants to spend all her time. They were the most significant part of her story more so than school, sports, or family (though her family is important to her)	More family oriented than the girls I interviewed so far, wants a husband, and a family and is less sure on the career but wants to do something she is proud of because *"I think it is important to be proud of yourself."*	She values doing well in school and when she doesn't she really beats herself up. It both makes her feel good when positive and makes her feel bad when not so.	This was very mixed. She is strong and confident and in many ways doesn't care about what other people think of her. She is Persian and has always been different so mostly she describes herself as not caring yet she is very self conscious	The two most prevalent were scholastic (see quote) and physical appearance though her comments around *"being friends with everyone"* seem to indicate that social acceptance is also important to her even beyond just her friends.	There was a lot of emphasis put on physical appearance, which I didn't see much in the other interviews. A very easy-going, happy girl.

	– funny, nice, there for each other, and talk about everything together all the time and could forever and ever. "We just like, we just talk for so long, and it's just really, really fun." Her friends are very important to her and "she does everything with them" so			Strong, clear, impressive. See competence and worth column.	about her appearance because of her nationality and the fact that she goes to school with a "bunch of white kids." When criticized by her peer group about her appearance it really bothers her.
11 Erica "You should not let other people	She has a friend group at school but they did not play a major	She has 3 close friends and they are not a group. She likes to be one	The maturity of this girl at 16 showed through here in that she	Very important, she relies on them yet she has a self – efficacy that is unique in the interviews	"I have a different idea of where I want to be than a lot of people." This girl is	Her self-confidence and assurance does not come from others. See quote in	Scholastic domain is dominant. This really matters to this girl and she takes great pride	Very intense young lady, high self - efficacy.

decide who you want to be."	role in her story. Her 3 close friends did.	or more of them in larger friend groups or socially with boys, but these are individual friendships. She focused on the importance of her and her friends sharing the same sense of humor (similarity) and also the similar interests and values	clearly recognizes picking friends with similar values minimizes the individual friendships. *"I don't need that kind of drama."* And At the end of the day to her *"the point is making someone happier and not making life harder."* So while there are	thus far. It seems to come strongly from within. Yet, much of how she defines herself day to day has to do with her friends, being with them, having intimate relationships with them, being able to talk about anything. *"Say anything and everything to."* "Talking is the thing we do." And mutual responsiveness or support as she described	*I thrive* / *I am competitive* / *I want to travel* / *I want to live an unconventional life* / *I want to live in different countries*	very motivated and goal oriented, and describes when she wants something she goes for it, particularly around school. "If she wants a good grade, she works for it." She has decided she wants to be a plastic surgeon who travels the world working in third world countries. She wants to *"go out and be dominant"* professionally. At 16 she has secured full time	first column. / and feels good when she succeeds, which she does because she clearly makes it happen. Behavior also matters to her as it relates to her friends, having good values and social acceptance or at lease the social part of her life is incredibly important and outside of schools is really all her story is about.

	are key. She feels best with friends because she can just be herself.	minor issues of squabbling or annoyance, she has no time or interest and has not had any mentionable interaction with the shadow side of friendship.	it. She gets a tremendous amount out of being able to just be with her friends and talk. It brings her happiness and comfort.		internships at premier Boston Hospitals for the summer to ensure she is able to pursue her dream.		School and friends and shared behaviors/values came up a bunch in relation her friends.	Nothing to note.
12 Ella *"At school when I am doing really*	Not really, but likes to be with one or more of her friends in a larger	Four friends, not a group, but 3 go to her school and one is her friend since first	Notably the issues that arise for her are around communication,	Now prioritizes her friends over family, which is a change for her in the last year or two. Mostly likes doing stuff	Very clear goals to become a nurse practitioner and a path to get there, including a volunteer job	Her confidence has increased via her friends, one of the four in particular she made a direct connection to	She cares what her friends and her teachers/adults at school think about her. The	School – see quote. Behaviors – communication important to her particularly

| *well, I feel good about myself."* | social situation. | grade and no longer goes to school with her. *"They are not similar to each other but similar in the way they each of have something in common with me."* Mutual support is really important to her and one of the things she values most about her friends is that they | misinterp retation or misunder standing with her friends which are easily resolvabl e when she or one of them addresses it which they do. | with her friends. *"I like hanging out with my friends and having a day when you don't have to anything but hang out."* | at a hospital for the summer. | this without prompting. Her very confident friend has been good for her. She noted that she felt that she felt friends she can grow with as an important attribute. Values her achievements at school both academically and relationship wise. She was particularly proud of the fact that she has strong relationships with the adults at school – teachers and guidance and | broader peer group, she feels like if they don't really know her what does it matter what they think about this. She used to but as she has gained more confidence this has become less important. | with adults. |

are there to support her, differently but still there. No direct mention of intimacy but implied in the "got her back" kind of way.	communicates with them effectively and regularly.				She derives confidence from her friends. She talked about behaving differently when there were friends around versus peers particularly in school. Yet, it doesn't seem	What others think clear matters to her and she generally seemed lacking in a strong sense of self given her fears and self consciousn	Social acceptance is super important to this girl. She wants to fit in and is very conscious of what others think of her. *"I am very conscious of what other*
Very small close friend group, two best friends who make up the threesome. And one friend	She is incredibly conflict adverse so doesn't get into any fights with her friends and if she does she fixes	Important but not as important as singing or at least it didn't come through that way. She really was only animated when she talked about singing.	A little fuzzy, not particularly passionate about her aspirations, a little flat in her response – she wants to go to college and have a family but didn't have a lot of energy	Two best friends in high school and a third in a different town.		She was a bit of a conundr um. She was less animated than many of the girls and is passiona te about singing, but

from childhoo d that she is close to but doesn't see very often. Very clearly articulate d that she gets along with everyone but is more of the sort of person who has "a couple of close friends." She described the friends as quite	it quickly. She said more than once that she "hates when people are mad." And cannot deal with fighting with others.	She does enjoy her friends and does most typical teenage things with them – bonfires, hanging out, and she likes the ease of just being with them and will miss that when they are not together next year.	or oomph around how she might achieve this goal.	to boost her self-esteem as it is somewhat situational. In a class where she has friends, she participates more and feels less self conscious than in a class of peers/not friends. What really seems to drive her self concept or worth is singing. She loves it, she is good at it and it is when she feels absolutely the best about herself. It brings her happiness, value, and	ess and also her complete aversion to conflict. She gets temporary confidence from friends but it doesn't seem deeply rooted.	*people think of me."*	didn't seem particula rly enthusia stic.

14	Yes, small	Two best friends different from her and each other but what draws her to them is mutual responsiveness and intimacy. They are there for each other, giving advice, and helping through the trials and tribulations of high school.	Experienced a	Very important,	Big aspirations,	Very strong sense of pride. She returned to singing time and time again as a source of feeling competent and worthy. *"I feel good about myself when I am on the stage."*	Really cares about	Behavioral – in that she	Vibrant and

Casey "We all push each other to be our best selves."									
two close friends, they are a very tight group that do everything together. She would "rather have a closer connection to someone." Her friends are very similar to her and each other, they share the same interests, are intensely	who are also close with one another. She didn't spend much time talking about others.	break up or down of a friend a larger friend group in summer of sophomore year – jealousy and boy issues were at the center of the break up. No real shadow side with current friends, they are so close, see each so much that any issues	dominant in her story about herself is how important these two girls are to her, her social life and how she feels about herself. Talking for hours, finishing each other's sentences, and being authentic with each other is what matters and was center in what she shared. Family didn't really come up.	just got accepted Pre Med to UMASS Amherst. She wants to be an oncologist and work in a Boston hospital as "it is the place to be."	competence and value. She wants to make stuff happen. She feels badly when she is not being productive whether that means in school, sports, going to the gym or learning something new via podcast. She is outgoing and enthusiastic about life and had a strong sense of who she is – intelligent, mature, motivated. Her friends boost her	what her friends think about her, it matters to her and it impacts her sense of self. Same with her teaches and her coaches. She is driven. She seeks and likes having their approval, it makes her work even harder (if that is possible as they way she described herself sounded intensely	values people with similar behavior – not big on partying, rather hang in and bake and watch a move and willing to engage in intellectual conversations. Scholastic – she wants to "do really, really well" in school but takes it to the next level in terms of wanting to understand the purpose of an assignment and then	intense. By far the most intellectual of the girls I have spoken with so far. Also very mature in her thinking and articulate in her answers. Her self efficacy was interesting in terms of her always wanting to be producti

	intimate and mutually responsive. They are each other's support system.		are minor and *"resolve within two days tops."*			confidence this is clear. She likes things that are intellectually stimulating. Outside of her friends, she feels best about herself when she is accomplishing something – school, gym, sports, friends being together and all "good".	motivated). Doesn't care much about others beyond this group of people i.e. peers and she didn't mention family at all	doing additional research to learn even more than was required. Athletic – being part of something bigger than herself matters to her and rugby allowed her to do this.	ve.
15 Colleen *"At the end of the day it should only matter what I think about*	Several small groups of friend, but one particular ly close group of 3 friends where she used	No emphasis on best friend	Minimal – when she voices her opinion sometim es causes her friends to get mad	Wasn't as strong as others – important but she doesn't spend every waking moment with them or at least that is not how it	Definitely wants to go to college and for one of the younger participants (she is 15) – she clearly has an idea of what she	Solidly confident in her academic capabilities *"she didn't want to brag but it has always come easy for her"* and had a strong sense	*"At the end of the day it should only matter what I think about myself."* This was an impressive statement.	Academic - showed up as important to her but not a strong driver of her behavior, none of the others were strongly present	Very nice, talkative , polite girl.

myself."	to live. This group is similar to her and she thinks of them like family. They haven't forgotten about her even though she has moved and she is glad they are still there for her.		at her but nothing they can't work out quickly	showed up in her story. She a creative person. She paints, listens to music, and writes poems. She likes to bake too, so more individual oriented and introverted maybe. She mentioned her family as being important to what makes her feel good.	would like to do which is working with teenagers. She looks up to her teachers and youth counselors and she would like to do this for others when she grows up.	of her self – *I like how creative I am* *I like how tall I am* *I like my taste in music* A bit self critical of the fact that she procrastinates – she is capable but lets things go and that makes her feel bad about herself at times.	She did mention being a bit self conscious about her looks but also is proud of her height. Her teachers are important to her as role models and so is her family. Yet she seemed to be her own person and be okay with that.		
17 Laura "*I have fake*	Has a nice group of friends now that	She also has one best friend who does not live	Strongest shadow side in all of the	Very, yet also has a very solid family and she spoke about how	Not sure yet, very in the moment. She does want to stay where	Shaken by the shadow side. Did not portray as strong sense	What others think of her matters "*a lot, a*	Not much other than the social stuff and the family	15 years old – freshma n – tough

friends, you know, the mean ones.	came together because they shared similar experiences of being ditched by other girls. Her friends are "normal", not trying to be the popular friends. She likes them because they are super nice and have families similar to	locally.	stories – *"She ditched us to be friends with the popular girls." "I have another friend who pretends to be nice to us, but is not."* This break up of her friend group early in friendship year was quite traumatizing to her – she	important they are to her, her aunts and grandparents as well as her parents. Her new group shares this value of the importance of family and she is happy about that.	ever her parents are and her roots are deep, her parents grew up in the town they live in, grandparents live down the street, etc.	of herself, her competence or her worth.	*lot"* to her. Her confidence has suffered from being ditched "I don't feel comfortable talking to most people since "it happened." Definitely more mistrustful and secluded.	strength.	freshman year.

16 Lisa	Many friend groups –	She has a real assortmen	spent a lot of time with guidance and was very troubled so much so that even though she has a nice group now and is doing well, she can't move beyond feeling upset that this happened and distrustfu l.	hers. She lights up here talking about hanging out with them and creating their own "Sisterho od"	Uniquely interestin g	They are very important – she is a very	Her clear sense of purpose was	Really compelling in terms of her	Didn't seem impacted	Athletic – very important to	Interesti ng this girl had

"We just talk to each other and have fun and I forget about anything I am having problems with."	t of friend groups and several best friends from different parts of her life.	perspective on her former best friend who dumped her when she started dating someone and then tried to be friends with her again. She was very clear that she was comfortable not forgiving that girl and not taking her back as a	busy girl and goes from one friend group to another and seems very energized by that.	engaging – go to college, play soccer, become a marine biologist and work to save animals. Oh and graduate with a 3.8 cum.	goals/drive – *I am hardworking I am determine I set a goal for myself I am very social* She feels best about herself when she is dancing, playing soccer and with her friends.	by what friends or peers think of her really. Seems resilient and just move on. She does want her teacher and soccer coach to know she is working hard and cares deeply about doing well, same with her dance teacher.	her. She is driven, wants to get recruited to play soccer in school and works hard at dance. Dance is her place, she can't wait to go there every week and dance her heart out and be with her dance friends.	multiple friend groups as well as individual friends
her school group has the most drama, she loves her dance friends the most. She has different groups to suit her different interests – sports, dance, social. The common threads were about trust – she trusts them all. As well as the								

fact that they "get her" and she can tell them anything (intimacy).	friend. Boy drama seems prevalent in her high school friend group but she seems to manage it. She doesn't seem to have time to focus on one group of friends too much.						
	Her small group of friends are her best friends.	She described two separate incidents		She is very self-efficacious – She likes to accomplish	What others think of her matters A LOT.	Didn't focus on any in particular just that she is a very	Interesting – lives with a guardian
18 Amanda *"When I make a goal for*	She has a small group of friends, these are	Very important to her (animals are too). She spends all her	Impressive aspirations – wants to be a vet, and combine that				

myself and accompli sh it, I feel really good about myself."	her "tribe" and she is quite content that it is just the three of them. They sound interchan geable to one another – She wasn't particular ly fazed by these issue as her perspecti ve was they just had different interests so even though there was some drama hilariousl y funny, very supportiv e of each other, good listeners, very	. One where her friend group broke in half and the other when she let a friend go.	free time and all her time in school with these girls and they are her social life.	love of animals with her love of languages and travel the world working with exotic animals and eventually have a family.	things, set goals, and make things happen. She is resilient – having to deal with alcoholic parents going to live with her aunt so she could go to a good high school, she woks very hard in school, has a job and has very clear goals, sense of self, and values. Participates regularly in a support group called Lateen for teens with alcoholic parents.	She is a people pleaser and wants to be seen positively in the eyes of others particularly people she respects a lot. ' Very important that she does the *"right thing"*.	hard worker and is resilient which showed through in what life choices she has made at such a young age.	left home because her parents drink and she wanted more for herself – brave and resilient.

	deep level connecti on (intimacy), intelligen t.	she emphasiz ed that the fact that boys, jealously and other stuff she felt was petty made it clear they had to go their separate ways.		As strong and confident as she is, she did mention that she is self-conscious around other girls her age regarding her looks.					
19 Megan *"My friends are always laughing and having a good*	Group of 6 friends that are always together, laughing with each other and are very mutually supportiv	No best friends, big group of friends.	Was 7 in the group but one was very jealous and paranoid and was ditched by the group as a result.	Very, her social world centers around them and this is important to her. Her story indicated that she would be lost without them and that	Solid for a freshman, college, and good job and her own apartment.	Likes doing well at what she loves – playing volleyball and softball. She is very *"on task"*.	The opinions of her friends and her teammates matter to her, the closer, the more they matter in regards to how she	Athletic – very important to her and feels best about herself when she makes a *"really good play."*	She was one of the younger girls – 15. Girl code showed up here

time together, they make me happy."	e of each other. Similar in that they are very adventurous and athletic like her. They have been together since middle school and are now first year in high school.	This girl stayed friends with the girl no longer in the group but it has been hard for her as it sometimes cause issues with the bigger group. This group seems to have "girl code" around the amount of time group members spend with	she would do anything for them, including not being friends with the girl that was ditched by the group even though she still likes her and sees her sometimes.	feels about herself.

Social acceptance – this group is really tight and valued, strong underlying current as to how much her world centers around these friends. School was a little mixed, she like sit but cares more about seeing her friends in the hall and the social aspect of school than the academic piece of	in the social interactions/shadow side commments.

	others and if it is too much, it creates friction. However it typically gets smoothe d over pretty easily.				school.

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